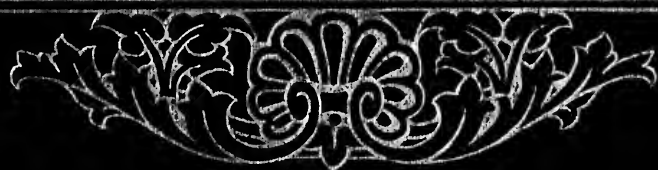


THE YEARS OF
FORGETTING
LINDSAY RUSSELL





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BY

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THE YEARS OF FORGETTING







"The woman looked down vacantly at that which lay on the floor."
(Page 320.)

The Years of Forgetting.

[Frontispiece

THE YEARS OF FORGETTING

By
LINDSAY RUSSELL

Author of "Souls in Pawn," "Smouldering
Fires," etc., etc.

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THE YEARS OF FORGETTING

PROLOGUE

A smile that one has given
Far stronger links has riven
Than those fast-forged of steel.
A nation's hopes may reel
On one word, said or lost,
That counted not the cost.

"*L*EGALLY," he wrote slowly, "*you have no claim upon me. You must obey, as I must obey, the mandates of the Church; and after this day, you must recognize that my silence is obligatory, and that it is better so. I trust you will be your old unselfish self. . . .*"

He paused abruptly, threw down the pen irritably, and leaning back in the revolving chair, looked out with a frown on the sunlit gardens of the Palace.

Shrined in its niche between the study windows, a statue of the Blessed Virgin stood, golden-haired and simpering, with out-flung supplicating hands,

and painted blue eyes that stared unseeingly past him. The pale blue and gold of her gown recalled, suddenly and incongruously, memories of a sun-flooded field of yellow stubble, of a long, dusty country road, of a girl in a blue gown, with golden light on her upturned laughing face, and her loosened hair blowing and tangling in the wind, gold as the ripening wheat. Perhaps a throb of uncontrollable longing came with the memory, a longing for those wild free days he and she had known together ere a hand had been set upon his soul ; but if such a thought came, it passed swiftly.

These things must be forgotten.

They *were* forgotten.

He was no longer a country curate in a hole-and-corner town in the dried-up Mallee reaches ; he was here, in St. Michael's Palace, a prelatie favourite, already marked for preferment, and to-morrow he would begin a tour of the world.

Only that very morning had the Archbishop spoken of his valuable work in the country districts, of increased revenues, and hinted that when this holiday was ended there might be a bishopric in the far North awaiting him.

Of the one barrier that might block the way of promotion, the Archbishop and he had barely spoken.

"There are no incriminating letters, I suppose?" asked the old prelate.

The priest hesitated almost imperceptibly.

"None," he answered briefly. And then: "If there were, she would not use them."

The Archbishop nodded.

"So! . . . Well, you'd better take a year's holiday—a year of silence, remember!"

"I will remember."

"She will have settled down to the inevitable in a year. They all do," the Archbishop added complacently. "Afterwards—come the years of forgetting, in any one of which you may expect to receive a printed announcement of a wedding. You will, perhaps, first receive many hysterical letters; but—silence is the only effective reply, remember."

"I will remember," repeated the priest obediently.

Now, back in the study, writing the letter that like a sword must effectually and irrevocably sever the past from the future, he found it hard to frame the words. An hour ago he had burned the thin packet of letters, that, scarcely knowing why, he had kept for years. He had never been able to understand why he had preserved them when once the glamour of romance faded, nor could he quite reconcile the action with his conscience. For those

letters were all so like the girl herself, little intimate confessions of her love for him, girlish outpourings of a young heart, passionate and undisciplined, and so often rebellious against the laws that parted them.

There were other letters, with a deeper note—pleading tragic, wistful letters—which were the record of one who had run the whole despairing gamut of thwarted emotion.

Yesterday came her last letter, full of the wild scorn of a labouring soul, full of sudden fierce reckoning of the consequences of her love for him, full of the knowledge that the woman must pay the price. All the bitterness of a woman who found herself thrust aside in the hour of her need lay in the folds of that letter ; and yet, the final appeal showed her clinging desperately to the fraying cords of love that once had so strongly bound them.

“The past is past,” the old Archbishop had said tranquilly, sitting comfortably back in his easy chair, his puffy white hands clasped to display his signet-ring, his rheumy eyes narrowed beneath bushy eyebrows.

“The past is past,” repeated the priest fiercely in the study. For there was his future to be considered ; and all that he might say or do now, he

told himself, would have no power over the past.

The Years of Forgetting !

The phrase of the Archbishop came back to him, full of meaning. The girl also would forget, must forget. He could count on her silence, not only because of her love for him, but also because of her passionate adherence to the old faith of her forefathers. In the past she had always defended and shielded his name from all possible criticism ; she had made no demands on him ; and she would surely not be unreasonable now.

Some strange feeling swept momentarily over him—a premonition, as it were, of disaster—and then as swiftly it passed away. What had he to fear with the Church behind him ?—and the Church guarded her priests well.

As for the girl, she would drop entirely out of his life, once and for all, and so, unhampered, he would face the future.

After all, it was wiser perhaps not to write ; most certainly he could not go to see her as she had pleaded.

He thought uncomfortably of what an interview might mean, for she was no longer a quiescent soul, to be bent to his will. He remembered only too

well her cutting words in one interview. Of course, she had been ill then, very ill. "Priests like you," she had cried passionately, "have nothing deep and true in your natures, no heights, and no conception of how to climb to heights. You pray loudly for Heaven, but you fight persistently for Earth's stairway of gold. Poor fools! to believe that money and power will buy a passport to the next world; poor fools who preach blasphemously of a God to be bribed!"

He had been terribly shocked at some of her views, inexplicable when he remembered her earlier training in the Church. She had not been like that when they had first met; and when he said so, she looked at him strangely, laughed bitterly, and burst into heartbroken, passionate tears.

Well did he remember that day! He saw again the shabby room where she lay, the shabby, neglected room in a strange city, far away from her comfortable country home; the dreary room with its damp-blotched, faded wall-paper, and its general air of frowzy and futile smartness. And there on the pillow, he saw again her drawn, bleached face, strangely exhausted, strangely expressionless. And he heard again, on the other side of the wall, a child's whimpering, fretful, incessant.

Yes, he heard that whimpering now.

He arose abruptly and paced the study.

Should he go to her? Should he not go to her? Conscience demanded that he should; but the relentless Liguorian teachings of the Church effectually dealt with a priest's conscience.

The Church would deal diplomatically with her, too, if she went to it for comfort and advice. The Archbishop had said so, urbanely. There was nothing then to fear—nothing to do but put the past behind him forever, and step forward to the place of power that beckoned. She would read the papers and see the announcement of his leaving Australia, the flattering press comments, the predictions for his future. The rest he could leave safely in the hands of the Church.

“Yes! Ah, yes!” the Archbishop had said suavely, with narrowing eyes, “yes, you can safely leave the rest with the Church.”

That night an acolyte touched to points of pale light the tall white candles on the great white altar of the Cathedral.

The air was heavy with the perfume of Madonna lilies and lingering incense.

The red-robed acolyte came to the centre of the altar, genuflected mechanically, and crossed over,

and the thin spiral flame he carried quivered on its wand.

A tall black-robed priest came wearily out of one of the confessional boxes that lined the wall. In the dim light his face looked pale and rather worn as he passed by the altar rails, where the last penitents were kneeling.

Up in the gallery above the door, the organist began softly to practise an *Ave Maria* for the Benediction ; and the rich deep contralto of one of the choir-boys followed the melody. Then suddenly the voice swelled out. The glorious notes rang through the great building, echoing and re-echoing among the arches, thrilling through the great cathedral in a volume of wistful sweetness.

“Ave Maria ! Gratia plena,
Dominus tecum !
Benedicta tu in mulieribus !”

As the priest passed down the aisle he thought, perhaps, for a moment of a far-away country town, of an upturned innocent face, a voice, sweet and tremulous as a reed-flute, singing an invocation to the Virgin Mother. The volume of sound grew in power, and filled the dusty building with wonderful harmonies ; yet here and there through the music a thin, high-pitched note ran insistently, a thread of

plaintive sound, that for one startling moment seemed to him like the whimpering cry of a little child ! And then the deep tones of the organ broke into a glorious falling cascade of melody.

To-night he would stand at the altar, he thought exultantly ; and afterwards in the crowded cathedral would he receive only words of praise, and hearty expressions of goodwill, see pride and reverence reflected in the eyes of his followers, and hear their voices wishing him God-speed.

The future rose exultantly before him, glowing with the golden aura of power and place.

The past was for ever finished. He flung all its memories away as, drawing a deep breath, he looked back at the altar, with its tapers flickering wanly.

The voice of the choir-boy followed him into the night, but half heard only, and as in a dream :

“ Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis,
Nobis peccatoribus,
Nunc et in hora, in hora mortis nostrae.”



Part I

"We cannot harness Fate"



CHAPTER I

FIRST MEMORIES

"The lonely heart of a little child
Is a thing that is hard to understand,
And the first impressions of childish years
May oft be written upon the sand,
Yet some may lie in the heart for ever. . . ."

THE afternoon shadows were slowly lengthening,
the long hot day was drawing to a close.

Along a narrow street in one of the poorer suburbs, where a few alien poplars struggled for existence, the air resounded with the cries and laughter of school-children. A group of them squatted noisily on the kerb and began to draw chalk-marked hopscotch lines on the asphalt footpath. And their shrill voices counted as the wooden block slid before the worn boot of one of the players.

Down at the end of the street, a gate clicked and slowly opened, and a child peered out nervously—a little child in a short faded frock, and with two long

thin plaits hanging loosely on either side of her face. Such a serious little face it was, broadbrowed, with eyes very deeply blue, and surmounted by a quaint straggly fringe that shone pale gold in the sunlight. She paused uncertainly at the gateway, looking down at the children playing noisily and happily, her little thin face very grave.

"Don't be loiterin' now; get them messages straight away," a voice in the background suddenly startled her. "Hurry, now."

A woman, rather coarse and stout, came to the open door of the cottage, a brick cottage of the usual terraced pattern.

"But . . . there's a lot of children there"—the child's lips were trembling—"those ones that always call me names."

She was very near tears.

The woman came to the gate, her sleeves rolled up to the elbows, soapsuds still clinging to her bare red arms.

"An' what if they do, you baby?" she answered in good-humoured contempt. "Ain't you old enough to take your own part?"

Then she raised her voice loudly enough to carry down the street and create consternation in the gutter group

"Let me just catch any one of them sayin' anything, that's all. Now off with you, Mary, and no more nonsense." She stood with hands planted on her substantial hips, and watched the little figure in its shabby red frock go slowly down the street and out of sight and hearing of the children, then went indoors again and resumed her interrupted washing and her gossip.

"Mighty short notice to get the kid ready," she grumbled to the neighbour who leaned over the dividing fence. "And as high and mighty as her lady-mother is, too!"

She bent over the wash-trough and the white suds foamed under her hands and splashed around her.

"Them kind always are," agreed the neighbour vaguely.

"Oh, not but what she's all right that way." The woman began to hang the contents of a clothes basket on the line, her mouth full of pegs. "I always said to myself at the beginning that she must be, because she worked hard, and never wore no grand clothes, not like the other kind——" She paused expressively, and the neighbour yawned and nodded her untidy head.

"But I suppose she says she married?"

"Oh, of course, they all do," indifferently. "But I've never seen any of their husbands yet."

She had hung the last small garment on the line and hoisted the clothes prop.

"But she may be for all I know, or could find out. There's no pumpin' some people. She only mentioned *him* once, and that only when I asked her."

"What did she say?"

"Took it quite quietly. Just said in that haughty way of hers: 'Nurse, my husband is away, travelling. It may be some years, for business reasons, before we have a home of our own.'"

The neighbour laughed.

"*Travelling*? H'm, it seems to be a way they have. The trouble is, they generally travel out of sight."

And she laughed again at her own coarse pleasantry.

"It might be so, though," said the nurse. "He might be no good, and have left her. You never can tell, these times."

"Perhaps," said the neighbour reflectively, "he is going to do the square thing by her, if she's taking the child."

Down the street, returning from her errand, and

nervously keeping close to the fence, came the little child. She had almost passed them, when the children saw her, but to-day they were evidently in happier mood, and only one or two of them called teasingly—

*" Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
Asphodels and silver bells
All along in a row."*

Her grave little face lit up at that, the pretty jingling rhyme evidently appealing to her.

It was so different from what they had yelled derisively at her yesterday, when her sensitive little heart had ached cruelly without knowing why.

She was an old-fashioned, lonely little thing, over whose head scarce five summers had passed, and the children teased her unmercifully, often because she peered longingly at them through the picket fence of the cottage garden, and most of all because she was never allowed to play with them.

" Why, *you* ! you're only a boarded-out kid," they had hurled at her once in all the angry disdain of childhood.

" A boarded-out kid."

The words had hurt the child, young as she was, and haunted her with a malice she could not understand.

Afterwards, when she had gone into the cottage that was the only home her baby mind could remember, and had asked what it meant, she had received the usual answer—

“ Oh, don’t bother me just now, child. Can’t you see I’m busy ? ”

She meant to ask Dearest when she came, but it was a long while now since Dearest had been.

“ Ain’t you really got no mother or farver whatever ? ” said a perky little voice, and she turned suddenly to look into the dirty, but friendly little face of one of the children.

The child nodded her head in affirmative answer, standing there, a little nervous figure, her arms clasping parcels from the store.

“ I . . . have a mother,” she whispered.

“ And what’s your mother’s name ? ” With the insatiable curiosity of childhood the children gathered around her.

“ Dearest ! ”

“ *Dearest* ! Why ”—scornfully—“ that ain’t a name ! ”

They let her go at last, and she went slowly on, lugging the parcels that seemed all too heavy for her small frame.

The sun beat hotly down on the little red-clad

figure under the mushroom hat that seemed too large for her, and the child felt very tired and lonely.

"If Dearest would only come to-night," she half-sobbed as she trudged on, "and never, never go away. If she would only stay, like the mothers of all the other little girls."

Last night she had knelt by her little cot bed and said three *Hail Marys* that Dearest might come.

Dearest !

The quaint name was almost the first word that her baby lips had formed, perhaps because it had been oftenest on the mother-lips. She would say three *Hail Marys* to-night also, and perhaps in the morning Dearest would be there almost before she was out of bed.

And then a most wonderful thing happened !

As she opened the gate, pushing heavily against it, her thin arms laden with parcels, the door of the cottage opened, and the usual shrill voice hailed her, but this time more kindly :

"Hurry in, child, with them there parcels ; and wash the hands and face of ye, quickly, for your mother will be coming for ye now any hour."

CHAPTER II

“ FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHURCH ”

Thou shalt keep silence. 'Tis the Church's law,
The Church that towers above the social law
She recks not of. Mandates of Rome
Are thy commandments, only these obey.

IT was almost dark in the chapel, for, outside, the day was fading fast. A thin grey sheet of rain was falling steadily over the city spires and tall warehouses, while over the river a dusky mist drifted like a wind-blown scarf.

The little church of St. Francis looked very grey and gloomy, wedged in between tall grim factories ; and inside there were only a scattered few, poor people mostly, reciting a rosary and resting wearily against the seat-rails, or kneeling near one of the confessional boxes that lined the shadowy sides.

Now and again, following the opening and shutting of a door, floated a whisper through the intense stillness—

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

The little shutter between the priest and the penitent creaked as it was drawn aside, and the sigh of the priest and muttered, half-heard words followed.

"I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John the Baptist, to the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, to all the saints, and to you, Father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed. Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault."

Three times the penitent, with his closed hand, beat his breast dully, as the priest leaned somnolently forward on his seat, his ear inclined in listening attitude.

The shadows grew in the chapel, seeming to gather around the red glow of the sanctuary lamp that swung in front of the tabernacle. One by one the worshippers drifted out.

It was late when the green baize doors opening on the porch swung inwards, and a woman entered, bringing with her a swift rush of the chill grey air outside.

She crouched down in the shadows near the altar-rails, her face hidden in her hands, and if she prayed

at all she prayed silently, for no whispering came from that deserted corner of the chapel.

Once or twice she looked up unseeingly at the altar, half-hid in shadow, and at the ruby lamp hanging by its slender chain, its light flickering uncertainly.

Rest—rest and peace—had been her one thought when she had hurried in from the outer world, striving to put behind her the memory of the long toilsome day—the brain-racking work of turning out column after column of social reports and “pars. of interest,” the drudgery of a free-lance writer.

Until a late hour the previous night she had toiled, wearily striving to finish a short story that would mean at least the week’s rent for her shabby room in a shabby suburb. Following on that had come the incessant clamour of the busy newspaper office, the dull, humming drone of machinery, the metallic clicking in the linotype room, and, later, the giant presses pounding into print the news of the day. Ah! they still seemed pounding at her brain.

Only last night had she walked by the river, staring with fascinated eyes at the muddy waters, while around her the city hummed with light and laughter and music.

Morning brought her a letter —a letter with a sinister black border, a letter that had sent her to her knees shaken with terrible, dry sobbing ; for the last link between herself and the old days seemed snapped for ever, the last hope of the alliance with the past broken !

It was a brief legal intimation of her mother's death—that imperious Spartan mother between whom and herself had been no understanding. The family lawyers informed her briefly that she was now entitled to a share of her late father's estate.

"Sorrow after sorrow," she whispered to herself in the dim church, clinging for support to the rails. "Sorrow after sorrow."

Nevertheless, through her consciousness there pierced slowly the fact that the cruel days of hack-work were ended, with the weary, brain-torturing night-hours of composition, that *must* create a sparkling "Ladies' Page" ; and that now she could step out from the narrow, confined room and breathe a clearer, wider air—no longer count up pennies, even—walk miles because she could not pay bus or train fare—face despairingly the fact that while a good appearance was essential, there was a piteous running-down of an ever-scanty wardrobe and a thinning of soles—no more *dread of the morrow*.

The shuddering horror of that wearisome struggle was past, and if she only half-consciously felt a sense of new freedom, that was perhaps one reason why the girl's thoughts swung back in a wide sweep to the days ere she had been caught and held fast in the pitiless machinery of the city, cruel-toothed wheels that had ground out gradually all her individuality, all her youth, all her youthful ideals, leaving her with but one thought—*Work*, one desire—*Rest*.

Once it had been but rest she craved, rest in the silent earth, rest that was flight, rest the coward desires who shrinks appalled from strange, unknown life.

Fate had flung her suddenly into the vortex of an unknown city, had taken her, shrinking and afraid, from the quiet country-ways, and left her standing, numb and bruised in body and soul, on a desolate road that seemed to her then to have before, as behind, only a great nothingness.

Into this little chapel had she come many times. Perhaps the faith of her ancestors called to her; perhaps it was that here only was the one quiet refuge in the great noisy city where she was an alien.

Leaning there with her head pressed against the grimy rails, she went in thought back to Balberry, Balberry, that old unprogressive country-town, where

life had once seemed such a white, wonderful thing.

With what far different feelings had she knelt in the little wooden chapel at the purple, windless hour of dusk. She saw—she saw—the little town of Balberry, wrapped in the amethyst gauze of twilight, transformed and lovely, unsubstantial and tremulous as a dream, in this hour of retrospection.

Out of the years many memories called to her, stretching out wraith-like hands filled with wild-flowers she had once been used to gather in the broken gullies and far bends of the creek, starred with unsuspected blossom, flowers of dreams and hopes and girlish ideals.

There were roads that wound by creek, and hill, and moorland, gold with fading bracken, roads trodden by unsteady childish feet, feet grown swift and impetuous in girlhood, until one came to the Fingerpost at the Crossroads of Life.

One of the arms of the Fingerpost pointed to the World, one to the quiet peace of the little country town; and there, too, only half seen now through the mist of years, was the broken, splintered arm that pointed to the road that led disastrously to Love.

Swift on that came the memory of a bitter letter her mother had written—the letter of a religiously

narrow and virtuously indignant woman, who forgot nothing, and forgave nothing.

Her mother had said that the father, hunting out some papers in an old cupboard, had come across a letter, apparently secreted and then forgotten. June's hand had gone suddenly to her heart when she had read that.

One line of that virtuously bitter letter she remembered for long, long afterwards.

"The knowledge . . . killed your father."

The words rang in her brain now, although nearly four years had passed since she had turned her back on all that had been, had gone silently forth with no reply to the questions her father had beseeched her to answer.

She was back in her shabby room.

The light failed and grew dim, the noises of the city lessened, the tumult of traffic died down. A *Herald* boy yelled stridently in the street below, the tram bells rang sharply as they rounded the corner of the wet, grey street, and their rumbling died away, and grew, and died away again.

The man she had loved more dearly than wisely never looked back to the past as she did, and he hated her to speak of it.

"There is only the present, sweetheart," he had

often said. And when once she had begun quickly :

" Yes, but the present also holds the past," he had frowned and put his hand gently over her mouth and would not let her finish. She remembered, with a sharp pang of anguish, how once she had believed that all the pain and sorrow was over ; how one day, back in the years, had a letter come from him, which she had believed held proof of the love he had always asserted as unchangeable.

There had been rumours of his leaving the country for a health-tour. A tour ! She believed that was the excuse for quiet secession.

He had said once that it was just so that he would slip quietly out of things—not openly, so that no fierce searchlight of publicity should beat on him on account of his position.

She had laughed happily, that day, looking at the letter in her hands, that letter which was to make up for all the sorrow of the past. Oh, she knew so well what it would contain !

As she stood there in that hour, leaning lightly against the mantelshelf, she saw the future, saw herself sharing openly with him the bright or shadowed days that might be their lot, in a new world that would bring for them both new life ; and in the dream all the years of neglect were forgotten.

Her lifted face, with its wistful mouth, had held the tremulous, eager light of hope that comes after despair, and its radiance shone in her eyes.

She had slipped down on her knees, crying aloud her pitiful little prayer of thankfulness that the old road of sorrow had ended, praying God to forgive him and her for breaking the laws of the Church.

And then she had opened the letter.

With a sudden, sharp, indrawn breath she had begun to read ; then suddenly she had risen, swaying, the letter fluttering from her hands.

Blindly she fell forward, gripping at the mantel, and on the russet carpet at her feet the letter lay.

Her cry had rung loud in the room, a sudden, soul-torn cry.

Words burned in her brain like fire ; over and over they repeated themselves.

" And so you will, I know, see that this parting is not only inevitable, but is for the best in every sense of the word. As a matter of fact, it could never have been otherwise. . . . I trust you will see also that any correspondence in the future would be painful and unnecessary . . . My future position demands that the whole episode be forgotten. . . . Legally of course, you would have no claim on me . . . "

The whole *episode*!

She could read no more.

With a strange choking sound her hands had gone in a curious way to her throat, as if she would stifle a scream.

Then suddenly she sank in a dully moaning heap on the carpet.

"Oh, God . . . *God* . . ." The words quivered and broke in her throat.

* * * * *

There had been a dim, strange procession of many days and nights since then, in which she went as one in a dream. She could not bear to think of them, even now, although her brain seemed stunned and incapable of any feeling beyond a dull suffering.

Necessity of action brought long feverish days of work, long nights in which she lay staring into the darkness with dry eyes, or drifted into a sleep that was not sleep.

Now Fate, in the guise of a lawyer's letter, had stepped in again, and there was no further need for work or worry.

Her mother and father dead, the rest of the family standing coldly aloof, she was alone—or—almost alone.

"*You are dead to us.*" they had once written to

her, in stern disapproval ; and, "*We want neither to see you nor to hear from you again.*"

Well, then—she would begin life again, she *must* begin again, somewhere else. There was no need to go out of the country. Australia was wide, and there was surely some quiet corner where she might find peace and some degree of contentment.

Perhaps, had she been free, she might have entered a convent, as one of her girl friends, back in Balberry, had done. Its apparent peace and oblivion of the world would surely bring balm to the sorest heart. But she was not sure. The thought came then of her friend, now a nun in some other State ; of the confidences they had exchanged, of happy childhood together in Balberry. Would they ever meet again ? she wondered ; and if so, did the sister in her sombre robes know there had been one confidence that her dearest girl-friend had never divulged ?

She was thinking now of the last Sunday they two had spent together, kneeling together in a little country chapel, with the sun flooding in through the green-painted windows, she with her head bowed, striving to shut many things from her mind, and Mary, her friend, with her face uplifted, her eyes on the white-robed priest at the altar, as he lifted

up his hands in blessing upon the congregation

“He is like to God,” Mary had whispered reverently, but she, June, kneeling there, had answered nothing.

* * * * *

With a little choked gasp, now, she put her hand to her throat, and then, rising, blindly stumbled her way to the confessional, that dim, musty box into whose dark recesses she had not gone for years.

The story was not altogether an unusual one, in a large city, where many strange things happen ; but to the priest in the box there came a breath of country air, a glimpse into a soul that had held silence to be sacred, and struggled blindly now for light.

“And what are ye going to do, my child ? ” he said at last.

“I shall go away—somewhere—where I can build life up again.”

“And—you will take her with you—you will take the little child with you ? ”

“Yes, yes.”

“And you must put—*him* out of your life, for the sake of the Church. You must put him out of your life.”

He heard her sobbing now.

“He—has already gone,” she whispered brokenly.

CHAPTER III

THE TWO WIDOWS

" Here where the lone, black pines
Sway ceaseless to the breeze,
With ever the far-off murmuring of troubled seas. . . ."

HIGH up on these great grey cliffs that frown out over the heaving waste of waters, and where the broken coastline of New South Wales curves to the far northward, stands the Gray House—a big, lonely house, its windows long shuttered, its garden for years merged into a wilderness of shrubs and weeds, yet flaming forth every spring into a wild, glowing riot of colour.

The Honourable Mrs. Oswald had wept many tears, and made many unavailing protests, when Fate and an eccentric husband compelled her to bid farewell to the sadly impoverished country estate, and a very much-mortgaged town house, in England, and come out to Australia.

The husband had squared his shoulders and set

his chin doggedly when he spoke of recouping the family fortunes in that far-away land, that to his fashionable wife was no more than a name, *plus* a vague background of cannibals and kangaroos.

The Honourable John had said no word about the mountains of debt his wife's careless frivolity had helped to accumulate, and so the wife bewailed her fate in vain at the fashionable bridge parties, where her friends commiserated with her, shrugging their shoulders behind her back, and suggesting that the Eccentric John knew a thing or two.

"Of course, it's quite the thing nowadays to be eccentric," sobbed his wife to a sympathetic bosom friend. "But there are sure to be people who *will* drag John's great-grandmother into it," which on the surface sounded a rather impossible feat, judging by the demise date on the tablet in the Oswald private chapel.

But the only eccentricities of which the Honourable John could be accused were a desire to work for his living (instead of, as he wrathfully termed it, "sponging on his relatives"), and the grim determination that while he was doing it, and re-winning the family fortunes in Australia, he was not going to leave his pretty butterfly wife behind in England. He had been out to Australia to prospect, and he knew.

How John's great-grandmother comes into the story at all is because she had stepped out of a homely farmhouse on the Oswald estates instead of a ducal mansion near by, and had married John's great-grandfather, who had been head over heels in love with her, while his relatives stood afar off and shuddered daintily at the mere thought of such a plebeian alliance.

The great-grandmother, however, had brought some good, if not aristocratically blue, blood into the family at a time when it was badly needed, and that was why at least one of her descendants was honourable in fact as well as title.

From the day that the Honourable John and his wife came to Australia, Lucy Oswald had furiously hated the Gray House, mostly because of its isolation, for in those years ago there had been no word of the Closer Settlement Board, and there was no village, as there is now, at the end of the beach road that winds crookedly down into the wide grey-green lands of this northern corner of Australia.

She disliked it still, although Gerald and Rosa had been born there, and although she lived there no longer ; for the Honourable John was dead. He had died suddenly, after an apparently harmless cold caught while he and his overseer were riding,

one wet day, over the many acres his thrift and endurance had acquired.

When the first grief was over, the Honourable Mrs. Oswald, garbed becomingly in deepest black, and wiping her eyes daintily with a much-belaced and monogrammed handkerchief, had tearfully but firmly asserted to the family lawyer that she would sell the Gray House and the many thousand acres thereto attached.

A vision of London, and of herself as a fashionable, wealthy widow, living just on the right side of Hyde Park, burst on her in all its radiance ; and so absorbed was she in it that she only half-listened to the level monotone of the lawyer's voice.

He had repeated one sentence a little sharply, and suddenly she had gasped as its meaning pierced her brain.

" Not *mine* ! " she had cried hysterically, " *not mine* ? "

The lawyer went on smoothly, pointing out the fact that he had been reading the will, and thought that she had heard and understood.

The Oswald Australian estate was not to be sold until Rosa, the youngest child then, barely seven, had attained her majority, and not then if his son, Gerald, and the said daughter, decreed otherwise.

“ And I—have *nothing* ? ”

Indeed, she had a great deal, the lawyer cynically assured her as he methodically gathered his papers together ; she had at least an income sufficient for an occasional trip to the old country, and for the building of another house or two should she make up her mind not to live in the lonely Gray House by the sea.

Perhaps because she hated the grim Gray House that to her had always seemed a prison, perhaps because if she were to live in the country at all, she would have as much comfort as possible, the big, red, many-windowed, many-turreted house known to the countryside as Oswaldene Manor, came to be built on a small rise turning its back on the grey, rather desolate valley that dipped inland from the lonely cliffs.

For a long while the Gray House had been tenantless, in spite of the many advertisements, announcing it as “ a most desirable country residence ” ; and for years the silence around it was unbroken save by the clamour of the wild waves beating at the base of the cliffs or the screaming of the seagulls on stormy nights.

Then one day the village of Gray Cliff had been electrified by the news that the Gray House had at

last a tenant; but for a long while they learned nothing save that a widow and her little girl lived there quietly with an old married couple as servants, and that the Gray House must be let for a considerable term, as several covered furniture vans had toiled laboriously up the steep cliff road.

The Widow of Gray House, as they called her, had not been "at home" or returned any of the calls which the local society had paid, as much from curiosity as from duty.

Mrs. Oswald was away from the Manor, spending, as was her wont, long months of the year in the more congenial society of Sydney, while the children were at a fashionable boarding school, returning only to Oswaldene Manor for midwinter or midsummer holidays.

The old woman and the older man, who seemed to be gardener and man-of-all work at the Gray House, were not communicative; but often the villagers, on their usual Sunday afternoon walk by the cliffs, or a stray fisherman, saw the house well-lit, the curtains in the upper windows undrawn, and the fitful gleam of firelight dancing on the walls.

And sometimes was heard the sound of a piano or the lightsome laughter of a little child; and once, when old Ben the fisherman was trudging by, the

child had clambered on the wall, and laughed down at him, her curls nodding and glinting gold in the sunlight.

From somewhere in the background a voice had called firmly but sweetly—

“ Marigold ! Marigold ! ”

The child had smiled at him, her face exquisitely pretty in its wind-blown gold frame, and then with a wave of her hand had slipped down.

That was how the village learned of the child's quaint name and how the friendship of the little girl and of old Ben began.

The old fisherman often saw her after that, generally in the late afternoons, clinging to her mother's hand, following the rugged sea-line of the cliffs; and old Ben would lift his hat and with gruff voice wish them good day. The child would smile and nod her sunny head ; but the mother seemed neither to hear nor see him.

Often the Widow of Gray House went alone, walking for long miles just at the hour when the curtain of dusk began slowly to fall, and earth and sky and sea were folded together in blurred greyness. Old Ben often saw her walking thus, a veil tied about her head as if to keep back the chill wind from the sea, her face scarcely visible : a slim grey figure

would rise out of the mirk that hung deepest by the cliffs, silently pass him, and as quietly glide into the eerie dusk again, the ends of her long veil fluttering in the sea-wind.

Once she had been seen in the old stone chapel that lay at one end of the village. Very few people went there at any time, for most of the Roman Catholics were farmers, and lived miles away from Gray Cliff, and the Oswalds were seldom at home. There was little money in the district, for most of the land was in the hands of squatters or companies, so it was but once a month that a priest drove over from Colbourne, the nearest big town, to celebrate mass.

From the day that the Widow of Gray House was found praying in the little chapel, and afterwards wandering in the curious old graveyard attached, Gray Cliff decided on her religion ; decided, also, that her husband had not been dead long, and that she had never got over it.

Having arranged matters to its satisfaction, Gray Cliff settled somnolently down again, and took the lonely house by the sea and its inmates as a matter of course.

So time went by.

Old Ben touched his hat as usual when Mrs. Gray

went past ; and sometimes the child slipped out by the gate and down the cliff path to him, and prattled to him in a quaint old-world way.

The village postmistress had supplied the name Gray from letters that came at regular intervals, with always a lawyer's imprint on the business envelope. There was nothing in them—so the postmistress averred, with apparently a well-developed clairvoyant sense—but a formal intimation of monies accumulating through investments, and paid regularly into account.

Books and strange packages and many things for the extra comfort of the inmates of Gray House came, but no other letters ; unless, indeed, some were received at the post office of Colbourne, twenty miles away.

The letters were always addressed in the same simple fashion—

“ Mrs. J. Gray.”

Mrs. Gray was a rich woman ; the postmistress said so, and the postmistress of a small country town can generally be depended on to know everything.

“ Two widows in Gray Cliff, and such a difference as ever was,” remarked the postmistress one day, as she peered among the rough letter-shelves, and sorted Mr. St. Hubert's letters.

Hugh St. Hubert, courteous and reserved as always, made no reply.

Miss Primrose had not expected that he would.

She had known Mr. St. Hubert for many years, ever since he had suddenly given up a successful practice as a solicitor in Colbourne, and bought land at Gray Cliff, settling down as a gentleman-farmer, or in the parlance of the country, a squatter.

He always listened courteously, smiled sometimes, and lifted his hat as he walked away. But he never made any comment on the small items of gossip that the postmistress dished him up temptingly.

Miss Primrose, long past her first youth, generally sighed sentimentally as she looked after his tall, well-knit figure.

"'Tis a lively existence here to be sure"—Miss Primrose smiled a watery smile as she went from the little room that was post office and small goods shop all in one—"with two widows and an old maid, and the nicest man in the world a woman hater!"

She frowned whimsically at the reflection of her sallow face and wispy grey hair as she looked into a mirror.

"Nothin' ever *will* happen in this place," she sighed resignedly.

Then, just at that moment, something a little out of the ordinary did happen ; for the little warning bell under the threshold of the shop door tinkled again and Mr. St. Hubert came back to the counter.

“ You gave me some one else’s letter as well as my own,” he began. “ This one is addressed to a Mrs. Gray.”

He turned at the tinkling of the door-bell again, struck by the look of unusual interest on Miss Primrose’s thin plain face, and a woman came in.

“ Why—the Widow of Gray House ! ” said the postmistress quite audibly, and a slow flush crept into her sallow skin. But the Widow of Gray House did not seem to have heard or noticed.

She had done an unprecedented thing in the history of the last two years of her residence in Gray Cliff by entering the post office and asking personally for her letters.

For the first time Miss Primrose, fluttering nervously over the letters, had seen the Widow of Gray House without a shrouding veil, and also without the grey hair and sorrow-lined face that the imagination of Gray Cliff had conceived beneath the veil. Miss Primrose had certainly believed her older, grey-haired, and ordinary ; but this slim, grey-clad figure, and the face under the wide-brimmed, white-

scarfed hat were anything but ordinary, and middle age was far distant.

There was a flush as of expectation in the Widow's face, and a faint thrill of glad excitement seemed to emanate from her, although she stood there, very still, and proud looking, apparently quite unaware of St. Hubert's proximity.

Her lips quivered a little, and her eyes wavered, as she watched Miss Primrose hunt vainly and very slowly through the afternoon mail.

"Nothing," said the postmistress finally. "Only the usual," and she put forward the letter that had slipped into St. Hubert's mail.

"Nothing?" Perhaps only Hugh St. Hubert, turning to go, noticed the thrill in the woman's voice.

"Nothing at all, ma'am," said Miss Primrose, her eyes frankly taking in every detail of the visitor's costume, and the astonishing youth of her.

"And—is this the last mail?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Gray." Miss Primrose raised her scant eyebrows at the idea of anyone living in Gray Cliff for even a day without knowing that only the one post came on this branch line from Colbourne.

Mrs. Gray went then, with no further word.

“And I meant to ask her a lot of things,” grieved Miss Primrose, taking a duster as excuse and making her way to an already well-dusted street-door, that always received an extra polish after anyone passed by.

Mrs. Gray went straight along the road to the left, passing Hugh St. Hubert on the way without seeing him.

The afternoon was growing late, and the mist creeping up from the waters, but the pale golden sunlight still lay in long level shafts over the green lands, and the high grey cliffs towered darkly against the blue heaving background of ocean.

Hugh St. Hubert, leaning against a fence, reading some of his mail, looked up as she went by, her veil still thrown back from her face. For one second he had full view of the delicate contour of her face, all its colour gone, and wistful as if with disappointment.

Mrs. Gray went slowly up the steep slope, picking her way mechanically among the loose stones. At the top of the hill the road turned, and the Gray House, in its high-perched desolation, came into view. And there at the curve, the Widow stopped suddenly and sank down to rest on one of the great boulders jutting from the slope.

She was still there when St. Hubert passed on his way upward, and when he had gone some way he looked back : he saw her whitely outlined against the dark shadows, her chin resting on her hand, her eyes staring far out to sea, something unconsciously tragic and pathetic in the hopelessness of her pose.

Was it a trick of the shifting half-light ? or was it true that as he had passed her he saw her hands clench ? Anyway, he had heard her speak—it was but one word, repeated drearily as if in answer to some persistent question—"Nothing—nothing !"

So St. Hubert went on, with a shrug of the shoulders, his heart (as he told himself) for ever shut against all women, against any interest in them. This woman appealed to him no more than did Ellen Mary Primrose.

And yet, somehow, her face haunted him, and though he thrust the memory of it behind him, it came back to him again when he reached the big iron gate of Gray House on his homeward way.

He threw a curious glance at the lonely house, set amid its gaunt, wind-twisted pines. In the foreground he noted an old man, bending over long-neglected flower-beds, and trying to recreate some semblance of a garden ; and in the background, a

white-haired woman, sitting on a stoop, knitting contentedly.

As the loose stones on the path scrunched under St. Hubert's feet, there came a sudden glad cry from the garden, and then the sound of impetuous little feet running along the pathway of white sea-shells.

"Dearest! Come quickly!" called a voice in glad welcome, and, with the suppressed eagerness of wonderful news to impart—"Dearest, God has sent the cat *three* baby kittens."

Clapping her little hands with glee, the child ran out on to the road, her curls nodding and dancing.

She stopped abruptly at sight of the man, and her lips pouted and her eyes darkened disappointedly as she looked at him, then past him.

"Oh . . ." she said—and there was a world of expression in her voice—"I—thought it was *Dearest*."

He had said no word, only looked at her almost surlily as he turned.

She was very little and chubby, and her eyes suddenly laughed up at him, crinkling up at the corners in a most fascinating way, and her golden curls danced a tarantella in the wind. She wore a short brown garment, fashioned like a boy's tunic, and short brown knickers, and, save for sandals, her

feet and sturdy little legs were bare from the knees.

"Oh . . . don't go . . . yet, man," she said, in a sweet, clear voice, and shook her long shining curls at him.

"Did you see Dearest," she asked, "as you came along?"

He shook his head.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't know Dearest if I saw her," he said sarcastically.

Her eyes widened; sudden interest grew in them. Step by step she came slowly nearer.

"Do you live in a cave?" she whispered. Her eyes were very blue, and a little scared. "You are not an ogre, are you?"

"Not yet," he assured her.

Her eyes searched his face.

"Do you ever see any fairies?"

"No." A smile flickered and vanished over his stern, rather ugly face—"But—I can tell them!"

He turned resolutely then, shrugging his shoulders a little impatiently.

"Oh, you mean fairy stories. But they are not about the Sleeping Princess, are they? Or Jack and the Beanstalk?"

"No, they are not," he said grimly.

"I know all those," she informed him with a little

air of wisdom, that sat quaintly on her. "Dearest told me them all long ago, years and years ago."

She was standing now, her hands behind her, in an attitude of a child at school, waiting for lessons.

A voice called from the garden, a voice old and quavering, but full of tenderness; and the white-haired woman appeared at the quaint entrance porch, shading her eyes from the sun with a wrinkled hand.

"Marigold! Marigold! you must not go out of the gate alone."

The child turned at once, as if disobedience were unknown to her.

"I must go in," she said gravely. "Good-bye for to-day. I hope I shall see you again, Man."

Her hair shimmered in the sunset-glow as he looked back at her, at the sturdy little figure, slowly entering the gateway, and looking once over her shoulder at him with wide, clear eyes.

A little child—with dancing curls!

He shook his head to thrust away the memory as he walked homewards, feeling strangely stirred, as if out of the lavender-covered lost years, old boyhood dreams had arisen, when a wife and home and children had seemed the one sure ideal.

The little figure seemed to dance in front of him

. . . to fill the deserted road with her presence . . . to stir some long-dead emotion in his cynical heart. Try as he would he could not put away from him the thought of that little child with her wide, serious eyes, her curls nodding in the sunlight.

"I must surely be growing soft," he growled savagely to himself.

CHAPTER IV

CHILDHOOD DAYS

Oft I wonder as I look
At you bending o'er your book,
Poring there so earnestly,
What dream-pictures do you see !

"**D**EAREST." Is "Dearest" the child's mother
or sister ? he wondered.

The word haunted Hugh St. Hubert strangely
as he left the crumbling cliff path behind him and
struck out on the two-mile road that led to his home.

From the cliff-top, glimpsing the almost level
panorama that unfolded before him, and with the
grey, rain-heavy clouds casting a weird, subdued
light, the scene was a lovely but desolate one, typical
of the sparsely-occupied Australian bush farther
north. Grey-green trees grew here and there in
thick clumps, long rolled-down spaces between
where sheep grazed, or the plough progressed ; and
then on to the far horizon the land ran flatly,
shimmering in the heat.

Beyond Gray Cliff, with its scattered tin-roofed houses, its jerry-built hotel and store in one, and its solitary blacksmith's shop leaning to one side with age, stretched miles of open country, wooded with dully green, lifeless-looking trees and slow-growing eucalypti.

Here and there down the uneven slope jutted out ghostly grey boulders, covered with mottled lichen, and on the slight rise, about a mile from Gray Cliff, and on the road to Colbourne, rose clumps of ornamental trees whence emerged the red-tiled roof and towers of Oswaldene Manor.

Never had the utter loneliness of the place been so apparent to him, the out-of-the-world-ness of it. Beyond this bi-weekly walk for the mail, taken by the cliff path, Gray Cliff saw nothing of him : deliberate isolation was the life he had mapped out for himself ; and not until to-day (although it was nearly two years since Gray House had received its new tenant) had he seen the Woman and the Child. He had merely noted them from a distance, like phantoms rising out of the sea-mists and returning thither again.

To him they had just been a woman and a child, like any other woman or child in Gray Cliff, or Colbourne, or anywhere in the world, for Hugh St.

Hubert had little interest, and less belief, in the fair sex.

His old invalid mother would probably say—

“Once upon a time, before his wife——” and then stop abruptly and sigh.

“I have shut my heart to all women,” he had often said to himself; and he said it now with some irritability, as the memory of the past hour came back to him.

He had, indeed, shut his heart to all women since the year when a faithless wife had dragged him through hell, trampling in the mire a proud old name hitherto untarnished. The divorce court had released him, but with a publicity that had sent his keenly sensitive soul into hermit-like seclusion.

He shrugged his shoulders as he thought of the Woman of that afternoon, sitting a shadow among shadows.

“Some gossipy letter, I suppose,” he growled savagely, angry with himself that he had even thought of the episode again. “Women fret over trifles.”

His wife had been of that disposition, querulous, hysterical over the pettiest things, flying into impotent rages, or moody sulks, that were even worse to bear.

He was very tender and gentle to his invalid mother when he reached the big house ; and a little later, across the tea-table, half-hesitatingly, and scowling a little, he mentioned that, in passing the Gray House, he had seen a little child.

" Yes, one of the maids told me some time ago, Hugh, that there was a little girl there." His mother's placid face brightened with interest. " And you actually saw her, then. What was she like ? "

She put the question wistfully, half timidly, as if doubtful whether her son had been aware of anything more than the child's presence at the gate.

He told her, with a sudden strange gentleness and the mother, lying back in her invalid chair, glanced up at him swiftly once or twice, her sweet old eyes a little dim.

A tender smile crept around her mouth, and she laughed as he repeated the child's words.

" The innocent little soul. How quaint she must be, Hugh ! Now, I just wonder who ' Dearest ' would be ? "

" Her mother, I should say." Hugh rose, and, pipe in hand, fumbled for a match in the old-fashioned jar on the mantelpiece, preparatory to passing into his study.

A wistful light crept over the mother's face.

"What a sweet little thing! The mother, too, must be out of the ordinary."

"Oh, I dare say"—he did not seem to care to pursue the subject—"I saw her also. She came into the post office this afternoon just before I left. He scratched the ashes out of his pipe, knocking it gently on the tray. "She was very young," he said suddenly, and then, as a grim after-thought, "but like all women, I dare say."

"All women, Hugh?" There was pain behind her brave, tremulous smile.

"All except you, Mater Regina." He bent and kissed her, and rang the bell for her maid, before he left the room. A moment later the study door closed behind him. The mother sighed then, and looked around the big pleasant room as if suddenly discovering its loneliness.

The story of the little child had set her gentle heart quivering, and in fancy she seemed to hear a sweet high voice prattling. Long ago, like other mothers who have no girl-child, she had had a dream that was not to be; afterwards, she had prayed that a little child would climb on to Hugh's knees, and be a bond of unity between him and his butterfly wife.

Now she had only Hugh—Hugh, greying at the temples, no longer the sunny, brilliantly clever boy of whom she had been so proud, but a man, reserved, even with her, a man grown moody and desirous of nothing, working like a common labourer at the tilling of his fields, and voluntarily shutting himself off from old friends and old associations.

The thought of the little child came into the room, like to a perfume-spilling flower.

“ If there had been a little child here, my son’s child ! ”

Perhaps the wistful thought floated also into that uncompromisingly stiff study of Hugh St. Hubert’s, where the only comfortable things were the rows of books, the deep leather arm-chair by the fireplace, and the thick goatskin rug where his favourite dogs curled contentedly.

After an hour or so of fruitless effort to gain interest in the latest novel, he laid the book aside and sat, elbows on the table, staring before him. Now and again his mouth took a half-bitter, half-contemptuous curve as he thought of one of the letters the mail had brought him : just a newspaper clipping that told of the marriage, in London, of a prominent vaudeville actress to the younger son of a well-known peer.

She had married again !

Well, if he had any wish at all, it was that she might benefit by the lesson of the past, and not make a hell of this man's life as she had done on his. As for himself, he said bitterly, this woman had irretrievably crushed all feeling and ambition out of him ; she had absolutely slain his every boyish ideal ; she had ruined his career ; and he thanked Heaven that she had borne him no children. Yet now, suddenly, there swept before him the vision of a little child, running out on to the roadway, her face lifted in welcome. . . .

His hands clenched.

Would it not have been better, after all, if there *had* been a child ?—perhaps, a little girl like that of the Gray House, radiant with happiness, filling his life with new hope and resurrected ambition. But he thrust the thought away.

Any child of his unhappy marriage could only have inherited the traits the mother possessed, and with them have wrecked another man's life in years to come, so it was better as it was.

He rose and flung open the window, breathing in the wind from the sea, the fresh virile wind that brought new hope and strength and clean desire.

Outside, the road to the little town wound upwards

in the dark, the soft purple dark, powdered with countless tiny stars. Far up on the rugged headland a light glowed yellowly. Often he had seen it thus far into the night.

Something seemed to sweep over him and soften his mood.

"Perhaps Thought and the woman of the Gray House also keep solitary vigil," he whispered to himself, with a sudden thrill of sympathy.

Perhaps she, as he, had suffered deeply, and had come to the mystical calm of the bush for healing unguents, seeking the anodynes of peace and silence.

* * * * *

"And will you sing me the little sea-song before I go to sleep? Do, Dearest." The child's high-pitched voice was very sweet.

"But, sweetheart, you are almost asleep now, I think."

The mother, stitching away at a small frock, looked up, and smoothed the hair from her low brow as if brushing away a thought.

In a long white nightie, from which her pink little toes peeped out, little Marigold stood on the carpet before her.

"I think I *am* sleepy, Dearest," she said after

a moment's consideration ; " but I'd love to hear about the little sheep going over the stile."

Her mother smiled, and putting away her sewing, held out her arms.

" Come, then, Baby mine, and I'll sing you to sleep." She took the child to her breast in sudden abandonment. " Oh, my baby . . . my tiny, tiny baby. . . ."

Outside, the sea was thundering against the cliffs, the white spray breaking and splashing high, the waters sweeping inwards with a mighty swell, and overhead the banner of night was spangled with stars.

Softly the mother began to sing, over and over again :

" Sing me a song of a lad that is gone !
 (Say, can that lad be I ?)
 Merry of heart he sailed on a day,
 Over the sea to Skye."

The little shining head began to droop, and the sweet voice, following the mother's, began to break drowsily.

With a sudden indescribably mournful note, the mother unconsciously drifted into the second verse, that she so seldom sang, for all of sadness was kept from the rose-world in which Marigold lived.

"Billow and breeze ; island and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was there—all that was fair,
All that was I—has gone."

The child was turning sleepily in the mother arms.

"I haven't—said my prayers, Dearest."

"Say them now, then, Marigold."

When the little child slept, the mother carried her to the little room adjoining her own. It was all white, the little bed, the furniture, the silken hangings.

"Just as her life will be, please God !" said the woman, with a sob in her throat.

For a long time she knelt by the cot, her arms across the silken coverlet, saying over and over again the passionate, pitiful prayer that no suffering or sorrow might ever come to her child.

Every night did that prayer of all prayers ascend to the heavens, that she herself would bear any suffering, so that her child might go unscathed.

By day and night a guard of love surrounded Marigold ; she walked in a white, wonderful world ; ever the old man and woman, who worshipped the child, helped to create and establish the illusion.

Over all this wonderful world, that held no sad early memories, brooded the power of a mother-

love, wondrously unselfish, wondrously pure. And so, like to a white May-lily, did little Marigold grow each day beautiful in itself, each day all too short for its joy.

The child had come to love the sea passionately and to catch its mood in her mother's eyes ; and she knew, dimly and gladly, that over it all was a wonderful Power which she could not quite understand, only that it awed her and made of the road from the Present to the Future, a shining, wonderful pathway.

The child was never lonely.

She loved the sea ; she loved the old house that to her was never dreary or desolate ; she loved the old weedy garden over which Thomas shook his white head woefully, as he potted among the paths.

Even the gaunt pines, bent all to one side by the battering of many storm-winds, found a place in the loving little heart of her, and their whisperings were the voices of the tree-fairies.

The day was always too short, even with its brief two hours in the afternoon for lessons, when her mother and she played at school. At first when she had spoken of earlier memories, the mother's hand had been laid gently over her lips, and gradually all that time had been rubbed out.

Through the artist-eyes of the mother, Marigold saw the glories of the sunset, pictures of the sea, the rugged beauty of the cliffs, the desolate beauty even of the lonely lands to the North. Nothing around her was sordid or ugly, everything had a wonderful meaning, so that her life, like the life of a flower, carefully tended and sheltered, bloomed whitely in a sunshiny place, where no shadows ever crept.

Often she sat on the wide window-seats of the sitting-room, a quaint old chamber, tower-shaped at one end, that hung over the sea, so perilously that it seemed to her, peering down on the waters breaking whitely at the base of the cliffs, as if the snowy spray on stormy days must splash up as high as the panes.

Afar off, sometimes, in the day, she saw great ships pass—mail steamers from England beating northward around the rugged Australian coasts, resting for a brief while in the beautiful harbour of which Sydney is so justly proud ; and often, too, at night, she had seen them, far out, swiftly moving, yellow lights gleaming from the portholes, with a winking red light swaying up and down, or a steady green one staring over the water.

The white gulls circling about the cliffs, and beat-

ing out over the waters and back again, with their curious throaty cry, were all part of her world, peopled with the quaint sweet dreams of a rare childhood. They were her messengers, these gulls, bearing her greetings to the great ships that came suddenly up over the very rim of the world in the shape of a burning star, broke into a trail of stars, passed into the deep purple heart of the dark, and so fell over the rim of the world again.

The sweet, serious eyes would follow them dreamily. Her mother had told her of strange, far lands, where she, on such a ship, would one day go, and see the strange, beautiful things around which books were written.

Once Old Ben had brought her a sea-gull that had broken its wing. The child had wanted to keep it when the hurt was mended, for the pretty bird had grown so tame, that at last it would eat from her baby hands, and flutter after her down the square of wire-enclosed garden that was its prison.

She had wanted very, very much, to keep it. But the mother, bending down, said :

"Sweetheart, it may be a mother-gull. And she may be longing to get back to her cliff-home, to her wild freedom ; and perhaps there are little baby-gulls who are calling for her. You would not like

anyone to keep you away from me, Marigold, would you ? ”

On the child's mind rose the faint, blurred picture of a little child crying herself to sleep at night in longing for her mother.

Her mother, reading the thought, placed her hand gently on the child's brow, a shadow in her own brown eyes.

“ Forget it, sweetheart,” she said softly. And then, more gently : “ Little Marigold, God does not like any living thing he has created, bird, or beast, or being, to be uselessly fettered. Always remember that, dear heart.”

Long afterwards, when childhood had long gone, and the shadow of convent walls fell about her, Marigold thought of those words, and of the strange, still look on her mother's lifted face, as if the woman's soul for the moment had silently poised itself above all the things of the world, itself a part of the Eternal.

And never, in those after years, did Marigold look upon the sea, or note the white lightning-flash of a gull's wing, without feeling on her brow the light, loving touch of her mother's hand, without seeing the rapt, serene look upon her mother's face.

So when the hurt was mended, the gull was freed, Sometimes it came back, sweeping in wide curves

over the garden, drifting down to the newly-turned earth in front of Thomas, the gardener, and searching for food ; or circling and flying low past the window where the child sat, calling it and clapping her hands when it floated past.

The world of the garden, too, was a wonderful thing, where each day she watched the green leaves peeping out of their tiny sheathes, or the baby blossoms slowly unfolding, until the rich red roses, that clambered about the old stone sea-wall, splashed their vivid colour against the lichened grey.

Everything had a wonderful meaning for her, bird and flower and animal. Everything was beautiful, everything was wrapped in the fairy haze of white dreams.

So the days passed.

CHAPTER V

TRAGEDY

"A storm in the world outside,
And a storm in the heart."

THE storm had beaten in on the breast of dawn, obliterating all traces of sunlight, save only an eerie, ragged, red cloud-fringe, that was now being swiftly blotted out by the mingling of grey sky and greyer sea.

With a mighty thundering sound the angry foaming waters beat against the cliffs, breaking over the lower beach pathway, and swirling noisily in and out among the rocks.

Presently the rain began to fall, whirling against the windows that faced seaward, and lashing the tall, black, wind-bent pines.

Little Marigold, her small face flattened against the pane, had seen St. Hubert go by an hour before, striding along with head bent against the terrific

force of the wind, his coat-collar turned up, and his storm-cap pulled over his ears.

He had not looked up at the house as he went by. Had he done so, he would have seen against a dancing background of yellow firelight, an eager little face peering out at him interestedly, and wistful eyes following him out of sight along the pathway that dipped to the village. Anything that moved on the cliff-path was of interest to-day, for the house was strangely silent. And the child, unused to being cooped up indoors, grew suddenly lonely.

She would have liked to have been out, well muffled, the rain beating on her face, with the blood tingling in her cheeks with the salty air ; but in the next room her mother had been wrestling all day with a nervous headache that refused to give way to the usual simple remedies, probably because it was the result of having lain all night awake, thinking of things that were best forgotten, and listening to the muttering of the thunder that had preceded the storm, and the melancholy, monotonous swishing of the wind among the pines.

No, it was not the storm that had kept her awake. It was a notice in an odd paper, that had somehow been among the other journals that came once a week to the Gray House, a notice that had set her heart

beating wildly, her hands clenching passionately, until, as day broke, she had fallen at last into uneasy, feverish slumber.

The little child tip-toed in once or twice ; then gently out again, to take up her old position by the window.

She heard the pleasant rattling of teacups in the dining-room below, and so crept quietly downstairs.

"Mother is asleep, Hannah," she said in her quaint, old-fashioned way. "And I think it would be best not to wake her."

"And will you come down here with me, my lamb?" asked the old woman affectionately. "You will be lonely, surely."

But the child shook her head.

"It's a very strange day, don't you think, Hannah?" she said wistfully as she looked out at the dripping trees in the garden. "But I do not think I am lonely."

"Why don't you play with your dolls, dearie, by the fire, and not look out of window? Then it wouldn't seem so stormy and strange."

But the child was restless.

She took her dolls for a while, crooning to them very softly so as not to wake her mother ; but she tired quickly and went back to the window again.

"If I could only go out . . ." she said to herself

for about the twentieth time, seeing herself in imagination running along the cliff-path. "If I had my coat on, I would be all right I am sure."

She hesitated, looking towards the adjoining room.

"I am sure," she reasoned plaintively, "that mother would let me go if she knew I wanted to so much. We have been out in *almost* a day like this."

She peered out again.

Certainly the clouds seemed lighter, and the rain was not falling so heavily, and St. Hubert, wrapped up in his waterproof, did not look as if wind and rain mattered much to him.

Then a brilliant idea struck her.

I will go to the post office for mother's letters. She clasped her hands at the thought, and then she was off—noiselessly—down to the wide hall, where hung her coat and cap.

She could hear old Hannah and her husband talking in the kitchen, and the pleasant crackling of the pinewood in the fireplace. She would be back, she told herself gleefully, before they even missed her, or her mother was awake. It would be indeed an adventure to be proud of, for as yet she had never gone so far alone.

She clapped her hands again and again at the thought of the surprise Dearest would get when she

saw the papers and the letters, and asked who had brought them. Yesterday her mother had seemed sad after she had come from the post office. What if the letter she desired came to-day?

In another moment the child was racing down the path and out of the gate.

The wind whirled around the corner and a gust of it blew her hair loose from under her fisherman's cap, but she laughed merrily as she sped along. The steady rain stung her cheeks, until they glowed like the red roses on the sea-wall.

There was no one in sight, not even old Ben. He was doubtless at home, by a cheery fireside, smoking his pipe, or mending the torn nets.

The child lifted her face, glorying in the elements as she ran along.

She was come almost to the end of the path and stood for a moment, looking down on the wild majesty of the waters. Half a mile away, in a sudden curve to the left, was the broken, crumbling ruin of an old pier.

She could see the great billows sweep tempestuously forward, and, the white spindrift, hurtling high, break over its thin black line, to tumble back with a dull booming sound that seemed to shake the earth beneath her feet.

She hesitated, glancing for one moment at the lighted post office away to her right, and then, with fascinated eyes, back at the little pier around which the seas fought wildly for possession.

She had always wanted to go there, to fossick for shells in and out among those jagged rocks that were warningly labelled dangerous.

Even as she looked a sheer wall of water reared itself out of the deeps and, with a snarling crash, broke over the pier; and when it as suddenly receded, it left the old unused pier jagged and broken, and a great gap that instantly filled with boiling foam, bubbling and flinging up spray as if from a witch's cauldron.

There was a sound in the sea to-day, a hoarse calling voice, luring and insistent, growing quieter, then louder, but never ceasing.

It was so, hesitant, poised as if for flight, with her hair in a wind-tossed golden tangle streaming behind her, that St. Hubert saw the child, her small face turned to the sea, her head bent as if listening to the wild Valkyrie music of the elements—for all the world like a small sea-sprite in her fluttering green rain-coat, and the long unloosed tails of her fisher-cap fluttering in the wind like beating wings.

He passed her by, noting the absorbed, intent look

on the small face, and its elfin beauty, the rain dripping down on her unheeded; and then, moved suddenly by some strange impulse, he turned and went back to her.

"Isn't it rather a wild day for you to be out, child?" His voice was gruff but not unkindly. "If the wind rises, the cliff-path is rather dangerous, you know."

She looked up at him gravely.

"I am going for the mail," she said, in the sweet, high voice he remembered, and now a little proud note quivered in it. "I saw you pass," she added.

"Pass?"—vaguely.

"Yes, I can see you from the tower window."

"Oh." He stared at her, grimly surprised that his coming or going held interest for anyone. He remembered, then, the tower window of the room on the curious, fortress-like second floor, built right against the high sea-wall that ran around the Gray House. Many a time in years gone by had he and John Oswald sat there, and spoken of the land across the sea.

"Hannah says you live about half a mile from us," she said after a short pause, during which she stared frankly at him. "What is your name?"

He stared back at her, plainly amused.

"St. Hubert," he found himself answering.

"St. Hubert." She wrinkled her brows thoughtfully. "Is that all your name? Is it your front name?"

He half-turned, smiling a little more at his own amazing attitude than at the child.

"Is it your first name?" she asked again.

A humorous light flashed into his eyes.

"No . . . that is Hugh."

"*Hugh!*"—she repeated it slowly. "I'm not sure if I like it for a name. I have never heard it before."

She thought it over for a moment or two, and then said, on a plaintive little note:

"Will you do me a favour, Hugh?"

The quaintness of her question brought a sudden laugh from him.

It was a long while since he had laughed, and the sound seemed to startle him not a little.

"What is the favour?"

"Will you always wave your hand to me, Hugh, when you go past?"

She had come nearer, searching his face with her serious eyes.

"But—you may not be at the window."

"You could look up and see," she suggested

gently. "You will know that I will be there on wet days."

"Are you so lonely, child?" he said suddenly.

"Lonely," she turned the word thoughtfully over in her mind. "I don't know, only I *would* like you to wave your hand when you pass. You will promise?" she entreated.

Grudgingly he consented, all the while calling himself a sentimental fool.

"I promise."

Then he turned surlily and went his way, as if already repenting of the impulse of the moment.

Half-way up the steep path he paused, with half a mind to go back, for the day was darkening early.

"The child has no right to be out by herself a day like this," he said savagely. "As I supposed—a feather-headed mother, or she would not allow it. But why couldn't she have sent one of the servants?"

He frowned up at the ominous sky.

"The wind is dropping, anyhow," he said, "and no doubt some one will come to meet her."

He looked back again, but the child had turned at the curving dip of the road and was out of sight for the time being.

It was only five minutes from the turn to the post office, and he knew that the mixture of curi-

osity and kind-heartedness that characterized Miss Primrose would assuredly bring forth that lady as a guardian and escort, even if it only gave her a peep at the hall-furnishings.

So he shrugged his shoulders and passed on.

But Marigold did not go straight down to the post office; she looked at its beckoning light, and then again, with fascinated eyes at the darkening promontory on the left, with its crumbling pier.

"And, to-morrow it may be gone," she sighed.

The blattering of the rain ceased as by magic, and that decided her to pick her way over the slippery stones and out and in among the great boulders. But although the rain had stopped, the heavens menaced, and the sea, too, for both darkened swiftly, and away on the horizon's edge one inky cloud gathered and loomed and grew.

It was a longer way than it had seemed, There was a mighty mass of rock to clamber over, and she thought of making a detour that would bring her out on the road again, but that would take too much time, she decided in her firm, resolute fashion.

So, on she toiled laboriously, on and over the rough stones.

Once, across the heaving waters, came a faint far-off mutter of thunder, but she paid no heed to that.

Half an hour later she was still clambering painfully, her errand forgotten, her little face bravely set towards the goal of the ruined pier. And then, as she stopped for a moment to look at the lowering sky, out from the sombre curtain of cloud shot a shining spear—the first lightning flash.

But neither thunder nor lightning held fear for the child, and it was with unflinching eyes she watched the black cloud rip across and the blazing shafts leap forth.

She was come to the pier, she stood close to the rocky beach edge, where the white spindrift beat up and fluttered like wool-fluff. Some of the spray dashed into her face, wetting her hair, and dripping down through the open collar of her coat ; but she only laughed, clapping her hands as was her wont, while the vehement and intermittent blaze of light flashed over the sea, where the waves ran mountains high.

She turned at one tremendous flash and looked up at the cliff, where the Gray House, bathed in eerie radiance, stood dominantly out like a grim fortress. And just at that moment lights began to flash in the lower windows.

It was only then that she perceived that the world was swiftly darkening.

The thought that they might be searching for her never entered her mind.

Up in the lonely House on the Hill, its mistress awoke from fitful slumber ; and, battling with the uneasy thoughts that had haunted her dreams, marvelled at the silence of the house.

There was no sound of Marigold's presence in the other room. No doubt, schooled by Hannah to silence so that her mistress should not be disturbed, the child would be in the kitchen ; or she was listening to old Thomas's never-exhausted fund of fairy-stories.

" Poor child ! " the mother whispered.

Her hand went gropingly out until it found what it sought—a miniature she always wore, a miniature that but an hour before she had torn wildly from its slender chain.

Now, her fingers closed over it tightly, and she hid her face on her arm again.

Outside the thunder muttered and growled, and grew nearer—a lightning flash lit up the room and the bed on which she lay—the rain on a sudden came down as if the very heavens had opened.

But the woman did not heed, for a greater storm was in her heart.

" He has come back," she said over and over

again ; " he has come back—and—he has never written. Oh, God ! God ! "

Then suddenly she began to sob short, dry, choking sobs that she strove to stifle by burying her face in the pillow. Her eyes were wet, her eyes that no longer held their high serenity of purpose, their steadfast resolution.

The past was over and ended. Those few eulogistic lines in the paper, hinting of honours to come, had innocently confirmed it. Yet, if she were only that kind of woman, she could dash the cup of honour from his unworthy lips.

" If she were only that kind of woman . . . " but she had refused to finish the sentence, even in thought.

No, she was not that kind of woman.

After a long while she rose, bathing her face and striving to erase from it all traces of the mental anguish she was enduring ; and after a while some of the peace and steadfastness of high purpose came into her eyes again.

" It is all past," she said to herself, as she brushed out the long thick ropes of her hair. " There is only the present and the future."

She lifted up her head then, on her face a look of solemn purpose, of determination to put every-

thing aside, everything but the future which held her little child.

"*She* must never suffer, please God!" she had cried out when she first took the road of renunciation, and she repeated it now. The eyes seemed suddenly to acquire a strange, luminous beauty, as if the soul shone out from within, and dedicated itself to all that was highest and purest.

On her knees, her head bowed on her outflung hands, she prayed for power to tread the lonely road of her life.

Down in the hall the little silver clock rang the hours musically, telling that small world that it was six o'clock.

She went to the head of the stairway, and called gently—

"Are you there, Marigold?" And then, "You can serve dinner at any time now, Hannah. . . . Come, Marigold!"

But little Marigold an hour ago, out in the wind and rising storm, had striven to find a shorter cut to the light of the post office than by making her way back to the road.

The boulder-strewn slope that led upwards from the beach was formidable enough for anyone to climb, and the hazy, shifting and lessening light

cast treacherous shadows. But at one end the slope dipped sharply towards the broken pier. Down there the road seemed less difficult, although more dangerous from its proximity to the sea.

When suddenly the rain began again, splashing down in great drops, and the lightning grew nearer and more vivid, all at once, though she had no fear of the elements, a longing for home, and mother, and warm fireside, swept over the child's heart.

And as she stumbled on bravely, the great black cloud overhead burst—burst in fury of noise and fury of flame. The little feet tottered and slipped; the little hands went out to clutch Dearest's hands that were not there; the little throat gave a plaintive cry that was lost in the terrific turmoil of the elements—and so the child slipped, and slipped, and was flung dizzily down the headlong slope to the sea. . . .

The child thought she heard her mother calling, and she had answered weakly, had tried to grasp at something as she fell, then she felt herself falling; . . . falling . . . with the roar of the surf in her ears

When the darkness swept down on the earth, it seemed to sweep down on her, too, and carry her with it.

CHAPTER VI

"THE TOUCH OF A HAND"

And something stirs in the heart, maybe,
As withering leaves in the wind,
At the touch of a hand, the sound of a name—
And all that has been, left far behind,
Comes back again, swift as leaping flame. . . .

"**A**ND she called you, Hugh."

His mother's laugh had something of the lost quality of her youth in it. Her delicate, wrinkled face was flushed.

"Whatever did you say?" She laughed again.

"I'm not sure," he answered, with a return of his old brusque manner, "that I said anything."

Every time that he had gone to the village, since he had told her about seeing the little child at Gray House, his mother had asked him the question, with always a half-wistful inflection in her voice—

"And did you see the little girl to-day, Hugh?"

Over the table that night he had mentioned the incident of the afternoon. And he stood by the

mantel now, looking down into the fire musingly, smiling a little.

"And I promised most solemnly to wave my hand whenever I passed," he went on, and the swift passing smile brought back to his stern face a momentary boyishness.

"Poor little mite!" his mother said tenderly. "I suppose it must be the sheer loneliness of that big house that made her ask you to do that."

"I suppose so," he agreed thoughtfully. "On the other hand, she may have peopled the road with fairies and gnomes, as I believe kiddies of that age do. *I* may be," he added grimly, "a modern Sir Galahad in a rain-coat and storm-cap. She looked a quaint, dreamy little mortal, herself, when I saw her to-day, a tiny tot perched on that rocky slope alone, daring the elements. She has a pretty, elfin little face like a Rentoulia fairy."

"I wish," said his mother involuntarily, with a rush of tenderness, "that you had gathered her up in your arms and brought her home here. Oh, Hugh, Hugh . . . !"

There was something in her tender old face that stopped the ready cynical retort rising to his lips.

He saw then that she was not looking at him; the thin, wasted face held a dreamy, rapt look as if

the child were then in the room ; and all the long years of his mother's forced imprisonment seemed to him to be made a suddenly tragic and unbearable thing.

From her chair, she could only hobble, very painfully, a few yards. Most of the day she lay there, half-sitting, half-reclining, with her books and her needlework, or the nominal supervision of the household, to interest her ; but she made no complaint ; she never made a complaint.

A lump in his throat, Hugh went silently to the study door, and with his hand on the knob, turned and looked back at her, a great rush of sympathy beating down the barriers that years of reserve had built. His lips parted as if to speak, and he made one impulsive step as if to come back to her ; when suddenly the loud clang of the knocker echoed through the house, a strange sound pealing from that door that faced seawards, seldom opened because everybody came usually to the side door that gave on the rolling stretches of country.

Hilda, one of the maids, engaged in clearing the supper-table, gave a little nervous cry, and a plate fell from her hands with a crash.

" Some stranger, evidently," said Mrs. St. Hubert, reprovingly. " Hilda, you should not be so silly.

It will only be a swagman needing food or shelter."

Hugh had hurried to go to the door, but before he reached it, double knocks came again, agitated, imperative, in quick succession.

Hugh flung the door wide, then stepped back with a startled exclamation, for the Widow of Gray House stood on the threshold; and behind her was old Thomas, the gardener, a lantern swinging in his old shaking hand, the rain dripping from his mackintosh.

Panting and unable to speak, Mrs. Gray looked at him inquiringly, and then gazed swiftly past him at the lighted room beyond. The hood had fallen from her face, and her hair shone damply in the hall-light.

She spoke but two broken words.

"My baby . . . my baby."

Then, at sight of his blank face, she turned with a bitter cry, and rushed wildly out again into the pitchy blackness of the night.

Hugh heard her fumble vainly at the fastening of the gate, heard, too, her moaning as the stiff lock resisted her numbed fingers. After a swift moment of understanding and instinctive reasoning, he snatched his hat from the rack and called for the servants' lanterns; he bade Hilda stay with his

mother ; then, was off and away down the pathway to the gate.

The woman was swaying against it as if she were about to fall. She tried to find words. But words would not come, and she fell, almost at his feet.

They carried her indoors and ministered to her, while old Thomas told the story.

Little Marigold had not been missed until the dinner-hour, and he had gone down to the post office, guessing that she would have gone there, but the postmistress had not seen her.

"Miss Primrose had not seen her!" repeated Hugh, and a look came over his face at which his mother cried out and old Thomas shrank. "She told me that she was going to the post office for letters."

They had laid Mrs. Gray on the couch in an inner room, and the servants were chafing her hands and administering restoratives.

"Poor soul!" said Hugh to his mother, with a strange note in his voice, "she is better as she is. When she awakes. . . ."

He did not finish the sentence, but with a lantern in his hand and the men-servants at his heels, was off again, out of the house and down towards the cliffs, where the storm-beset sea fought and howled wildly, like a living thing in torment.

"The mistress thought she might have come here," said Thomas. "Little Miss Marigold was always saying that there must be a lot of little child-fairies living here, and that she would some day come to see them."

He looked at the white, insensible face of his mistress, and his old lips trembled.

Hugh and his companions had gone on hurriedly, and then in silence, finding at the top of the cliff old Ben and about twenty men and women, all searching, the women huddled together and talking in whispers.

Old Ben shook his head. He had been searching for over an hour, and well he knew the cliffs and the rocky beach below.

"We have been all around the cliffs here as far as we could go, sir," he said. "There's only the beach track below and—the tide has been in for hours."

There was a sudden sob behind them, and turning, St. Hubert saw Miss Primrose, the tears streaming down her face.

"She never came near me for the mail," she cried. "It was a busy day, and I was in the shop all afternoon. I thought I saw her about four o'clock on the path, looking down towards the sea."

"That was when I saw her last," said Hugh. Then—"Listen!"

He thought he had heard a cry ; but there was no cry, only the rush and roar of the sea—a thunderous boom as it beat against the cliffs and swept back, and the screaming of a startled seagull.

The rain still fell steadily, heavily, making foothold difficult, while, spreading out again in long lines, the men began to search under Hugh's direction. Silently they worked, clambering over dangerous rocks, flashing lantern's light into dark hollows in the rocks, into tiny, unexpected caves, coming now and again to a grim washaway whose crumbling edge slipped sheer down to the unfathomable depths of the ocean.

The lightning had died away, and there was now only the fitful light of the lanterns, but the men worked steadily, the women grouped together, following, whispering in furtive groups.

Old Ben knew every part of the coast, every nook and crevice of the cliffs. So St. Hubert and he had gone ahead, bending over and examining all possible ledges, clambering over and hanging precariously to the jutting rocky points, until they came at last to the end of the pathway.

Here the rocks jutted sharply out and over the sea, and the white spindrift hurtled high in the air, and in the darkness the waves were like hills rising

blackly out of the black night, capped with gurgling foam, leaning forward, and then tumbling with a roar. It was then, at the most dangerous point, that old Ben gave a sudden exclamation and stooped.

At his feet lay a tiny square of white muslin and lace, blown into a crevice, a child's handkerchief, torn and soiled now. When he had picked it up, old Ben straightened himself, looking at St. Hubert, and slowly passed the back of his old wrinkled hand across his eyes.

Hugh St. Hubert turned from Ben to look at the roaring swelter of water far below with compressed lips, and into his gaze swam the sudden vision of a little child dancing down a white sea-shelled pathway with the sunlight on her nodding curls.

He wheeled round at a sharp cry from the women in the rear, and on the dangerous path behind them he saw the flying figure of a woman.

St. Hubert knew instinctively that it was Mrs. Gray. He smothered an angry exclamation that Hilda should have let her go ; but when the lantern-light fell on her white face, he knew no power on earth could have stopped her from coming.

He said something to old Ben in a swift undertone, and then went to meet her. Her eyes looked at him with no recognition in their depths. They

stared past him, with anguish, and she only asked, hoarsely, the one question, to which he answered with the sad, "Not yet."

He knew that old Ben held out no further hope, although he was issuing directions to search the whole line of beach, almost to the broken pier. It was inconceivable that the child could have gone so far.

"It would be best if you were to go home, ma'am," Ben ventured to suggest respectfully. "'Tis no night for you to be out, at all, and—and we'll bring the little lady in as soon as we find her."

"My child is out in the night," she cried hoarsely, and old Ben turned away from the agony in her face. "My child is out in the night, somewhere. O God, God! . . ."—the words quivered and broke in her throat.

So they searched on, beating along the road, and then nearer to the pier, but now hopelessly.

Now and again the mother called out wildly—

"Marigold! Marigold!" and the sound of her voice struck to the listeners' very hearts.

There was no answer save that of the sea.

The men had come to the great heap of rocks that blackly blocked the way to the pier, and the ugly slope rose out of the night in a sheer grim wall, that barred further progress.

Beyond that there was no need to go. The tide was in, swirling over the lower beach, sobbing gutturally among the rocky caves; and any living thing would long ago have been most surely drawn out and engulfed in the ocean.

To-morrow, or the day after (or, alas!—perhaps never), they would find what they sought, among the driftwood on the beach. The pier was only now a white, surging mass of water.

When they came to that rocky barrier of the slope, the men stood waiting uncertainly, and in the background the women huddled together in a deepening sense of tragedy, staring with dim eyes at the tragic figure of the mother, listening to her despairing calls.

In front of the women rose the wall of rock, seemingly impassable.

The mother, sensing their hopeless thoughts, took an unsteady step or two towards it.

"Marigold! Marigold!" she whispered stupidly, her voice dying away inarticulately, "Marigold."

She was aware of some one near her, a presence strong and comforting; and dully, strangely, she repeated, like a child conning a lesson—"Sorrow upon sorrow; sorrow upon sorrow."

Out of the mist that beat around her, com-

passionate hands reached out to hers, first of them all a man's hand, strong, pulsing with sudden tenderness.

And a strong voice, broken a little, spoke to her, but only half consciously she heard it.

"Miss Primrose and I will help you home. Can you walk, do you think? You are wet through—you will be very ill—you must rest."

"Rest . . . rest," she repeated mechanically and without knowing what it was she said. With unseeing eyes she stared at them glassily—stared for an eternity; and then, the black barrier of rock toppled forward, and with a terrific crash, bore down upon her brain, fell upon it, crushed it, and the darkness of death blotted out all consciousness.

No, not all consciousness; for some secret spring still moved, and her lips went on repeating, "Sorrow after sorrow, sorrow after sorrow," when it was not "My baby! my baby!"

And somehow, in the middle of this new night fallen upon her, she had the feeling that strong arms went about her and held her, strong, sheltering arms.

"Some one—run for the doctor—telephone," cried Hugh St. Hubert. "Quick, for our duty—is towards the living."

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNING

The night creeps on, and with the dawn
The shadows slowly pass ; ah, if life too
Could with the night shed all its sorrow,
Know that, with the sunlit breaking of the morrow,
New hopes and dreams would be reborn.

IT was old Thomas, after all, who found the child, old Thomas, who, stricken by the sight of his mistress's face, had searched wildly again and again around the rocky slope, clambering up and down, leaving no nook unexplored, at every step risking his old life, the sound of the mocking, treacherous sea ever in his ears. Old Ben, unable to shut out from his mind the child's sweet, laughing face as he had last seen it, went with him, shaking his head hopelessly, however ; while the rest of the men, wearily gathered in little groups in the roadway, or standing outside the gate of Gray House, waited with their wives for the doctor from Colbourne.

The widow of Gray House was still unconscious, as when Hugh St. Hubert had carried her in, through the open gate where stood Hannah, white-faced and helpless with woe, a lantern swaying in her trembling hand, and into the hall that was a blaze of light.

Miss Primrose and two or three women had followed him, almost useless, however, and inclined to be hysterical, so that practically everything had been left to St. Hubert.

He it was who had rapped out quick orders and sent for the one nurse the village possessed, he who had carried the slight, unconscious figure up the rose-carpeted staircase into the spacious room that overlooked the sea.

As he laid his burden down on a wide chintz-covered couch under the window, he noted that the fire still burned cheerily, its golden dancing light playing on the high white walls, and glimmering fitfully on the dainty silver appointments of the dressing-table, and the quaint oaken bed at the farther end.

A big blue delft bowl, full of violets that filled the air with subtle fragrance, stood on a high white table in the centre of the room; and pale mauve curtains were looped back from the wide windows that faced the sea.

He left her then to the womenfolk, taking downstairs with him a haunting memory of a white, unconscious face, strangely childlike in the soft frame of loosened hair that streamed over the violet cushions of the couch. It seemed hours before he heard the thudding of the doctor's motor in the distance ; and then a sudden wild cheer, that broke and echoed, and re-echoed, and rose again, with a sound in it that brought a lump to the throat and a swift rush of tears to the eyes.

The woman in the sea-chamber heard it, too, but only faintly, as she battled her way back to consciousness.

Through a long, long shadowy aisle of suffering she had come back only to break into a darker world of grief. Her hands went out vainly, clutching her throat as if choking, fumbling futilely at the silver miniature case, her voice breaking into hoarse, inarticulate words.

"Hush, hush, my lamb." Miss Primrose was kneeling beside her, patting her hand soothingly, her own voice broken with sobs. The cheer sounded again : the great gate at the entrance banged ; and then there was the steady tramp-tramp of men up the sea-shelled pathway to the hall door.

The woman tried to struggle to her feet, her lips

moving wordlessly, her eyes fixed on the door. Abruptly the door opened, and the Colbourne doctor came in. She slipped with a moan to the floor.

Miss Primrose, with a little gasp of emotion, leaned helplessly against the wall.

The doctor ordered her out of the room sharply.

He called St. Hubert, and together they lifted the unconscious figure of the mistress of Gray House.

Her eyes opened, with their dumb agony fastened on the doctor.

"It's all right, little woman," he had said with cheerful, professional sympathy. "It's all right, all right."

He had taken her wrist in one hand; with the other he fumbled in his pocket for a case, and St. Hubert opened it for him.

"Everything will be all right," the doctor had said distinctly and very slowly in her ear.

There was a sudden pricking sensation in the slender wrist; and a moment later the doctor drew the pillow from under her head, looking for an instant down at the white, unconscious face.

He passed hurriedly out of the room as the sound of excited voices penetrated even to this vast chamber, reaching the lower room just as they brought the

child in. Very gently they laid her down, and, at a word from the doctor, passed out again.

Hugh went with them, waiting in an adjacent room in case he should be needed, knowing that the nurse now in the room with the doctor was capable and reliable.

From the broken narrative of old Thomas he gathered the story of how they had found the child, on a narrow ledge, wedged between two rocks in the most dangerous slope to the sea, while within only a few yards of her the sea lapped hungrily, and her golden hair was sodden with the up-flung spray.

She was still alive, semi-unconscious, when they found her, moaning a little, and when they lifted her had lapsed into merciful unconsciousness.

Once the door behind St. Hubert abruptly opened.

"Tell my man to go back for chloroform and a trained nurse, and to go quickly. It's urgent." He shut the door again.

A second later the motor thudded down the hill road and out of sight, turning the corners at a dangerous pace, for the chauffeur knew what the doctor's "urgent" meant. Then a great silence settled on the house, broken only now and again by uneasy whisperings from the kitchen or garden,

where the warm-hearted villagers still waited, or by moans from the room where the child lay.

St. Hubert had sent word back to his mother that the child was found, knowing that at present he could give no clearer message than that.

When, now and again, a faint moaning sound came from the adjacent room, the weak moaning of a little child in pain, the sound struck into his very vitals, plucked at his very heart-strings.

Restlessly he paced up and down, while the moaning went on and on, for what seemed hours. When it died away it left fear in its trail, and a great silence that even a whisper dared not break, and in the kitchen below Hannah told her beads, and the women huddled together.

The motor came at last, and the chauffeur brought the surgical case, mopping his brow evidently with thought of the pace at which he had taken the ugly cliff-road; and the nurse, her face a little white, slipped quickly into the inner room.

Afterwards there was a swift rustling sound, the metallic clinking as of steel in an enamel bowl.

Once St. Hubert was sent for hot water and towels. He heard the doctor's voice often, but could not catch the words; and once there came a hideous sound as if the child were choking.

It seemed to him he would hear that sound as long as life lasted.

Then silence dipped over the house again, so that he could only hear the dull spattering of the rain on the trees in the garden, and now and again the gurgling of a broken water-spout somewhere on the slated roof.

One by one the villagers trooped home, and Hannah tip-toed upstairs to his door, in dumb inquiry, but he only shook his head.

It seemed that it must be nearly morning before there came a sound from the room, from underneath the closed door of which drifted the pungent, sickly fumes of the anæsthetic.

It was as if the doctor gave a deep breath, followed by a faint slapping sound.

After a long while he heard the child's voice, very weak.

"Dearest . . . dearest" it had trailed off again into silence, and a second later the doctor came out, unwinding himself from what looked like a white sheet.

He yawned and nodded his head at St. Hubert.

"Is there a whisky and soda about, old chap? You used to know the run of the place in the old days."

They unearthed some whisky in the dining-room, in a spirit cabinet, that looked as if it had never been opened, but only kept in case of emergency.

"Good whisky, too." The doctor appraised it appreciatively, closing one eye with the air of a connoisseur. "You'd better have some, Hugh, old man. You look done up. You, and the others, too, must have had a pretty hard scramble over those rocks. It's a wonder the child wasn't killed."

"Is she badly hurt?"

"Yes . . . pretty badly. I was afraid her spine was injured. Poor kiddie, she has a leg and two ribs broken, and will have to lay up for a while. That is only the effects of the chloroform"—as the child's voice broke out suddenly into half-crying words.

His eyes took in the furnishings of the room.

"Artistic, and evidently wealthy. Who is she, Hugh?"

"Don't know, Tom," The doctor and he were old friends. "She is a widow, and Miss Primrose, the postmistress, says she has money."

"Oh, Miss Primrose," the doctor laughed softly. "Gad, if the information hails from a country post office, you can guess it's about right. She must have the views of a hermit to come to a place like

this. Still, there's no accounting for tastes. I think I'll go up and see her. She should be quiet for a few hours."

He was back in a moment.

"I've given her a pretty good lot of morphia. The nurse, of course, is going to stay, so everything will be all right now. Can I give you a lift home, Hugh?"

The two men went then, passing out through the entrance hall that was still ablaze with light.

The rain had ceased, and in the grey, cloud-swathed sky day was breaking. Over the waters a pearly band of light, faintly rose-edged, glimmered with the promise of dawn.

With a prayer in his heart that day might bring hope and happiness to the Gray House, St. Hubert bared his head.

Long after the doctor's motor had disappeared down the winding road towards Colbourne, he stood at the homestead gate. At his own threshold he paused again, and looked back at the Gray House high on the hill, with that spreading band of rose and pearly light behind it.

He thought of the little child, sleeping no doubt by now, and the white-capped nurse watching beside her; and then Thought mounted the stairs

also, and looked wistfully in on that spacious sea-chamber where a woman lay, pale, sweet-faced, the long lashes, dark and wet, resting on her cheeks.

He looked back again at the breaking dawn, at the clouds drifting lazily before the dawn-wind, and something broke in his heart, and set all its strings a-quiver.

"Poor little woman," he said, with a new, strange tenderness. "Poor little woman."

And that was the beginning.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMRADESHIP OF SYMPATHY

Love sometimes comes, finger upon her lip,
Silently peeping around the heart's door.
Carrying not flame of fire, only white lantern-light,
Casting the rare pearl of moonlight before.

“**B**UT what happened to the Wee Fairy, Hugh, dear? Did she just disappear, or did she grow up?”

The little elfin face smiled up at him, a little pale and thin through long and enforced confinement indoors. Marigold lay on a high-wheeled couch in the spacious drawing-room, a low pillow tied with ribbons under her head, ribbons blue as her eyes, and her eyes were blue as the wondrous sunlit sea that swayed lazily out beyond the headland.

“I think,” laughed the mother, turning to St. Hubert, “that it would be best for the fairy to disappear, as the tea-tray is coming. You’ll only get more hopelessly involved if you let the Wee Fairy grow up. I warn you that every day of her

life, and every detail of every day, will have to be faithfully given, even to the frocks she wore. You're not very good at frocks, you know, and your last colour scheme is best forgotten."

"Let me see." The rare smile broke over his stern face. "What *did* she wear last?"

"Bright red, with a green hat," said Marigold breathlessly, "and pink socks; but" —consolingly—"she did have *very* high gold boots, Hugh, so perhaps you would not notice the socks."

"'Tis to be hoped not," laughed the mother.

"Ye gods," he groaned ruefully, "I can't let her disappear in that raiment among the clouds."

"She *would* have rather the effect of a parachute," agreed Mrs. Gray, as she hid a smile in the delicately coloured cushion cover she was embroidering.

"I'd love," said Marigold gravely, "I'd just love her to have just *one* more frock, Hugh, dear."

"Well, let me see. . . . Oh, all pale cream, and a bunch of red roses."

"Why, just like Dearest's gown," cried the child ecstatically.

St. Hubert coloured suddenly, but the widow of Gray House did not seem to heed.

She was still threading the shining embroidery needle in and out of the pale silk, her face, serene

and intent, bent over her work, her heavy hair, of a warm coppery shade, drooping a little over one ear and partly shadowing it, while the bronze red ribbon at her waist was almost the same colour.

"So she drifted up in the cloud-ship and away from sight, till at last her frock and the clouds seemed one."

"But, Hugh, dear, I've *never* seen a *cream* cloud?"

"Oh, they only come at night," he avowed, "when the fairies disappear, and little girls like you are sound asleep; and the clouds look cream against a very dark sky."

"But wouldn't it be too dark to see them, Hugh?"

He shook his head, not to be caught tripping.

"And so that was the end of the story," he finished triumphantly. "Whereupon they lived happily ever afterwards."

"Who did?" Marigold wrinkled her brows.

"There was only the Wee Fairy left, you know. Hugh; so *who* could be the *they* who would live happily?"

"Why, the Wee Fairy and—er—the Cloud."

The woman lifted her head and laughed. The silvery echoes danced the room like a chime of bells; and he laughed back, with a boyishness that sat well on him.

She laid down her work, and still smiling, rose and touched a button in the wall.

"You will surely need some refreshment after this afternoon's effort of imagination." Her wonderful brown eyes, that were of the velvety softness of wallflowers, were still sparkling with amusement.

She was very beautiful in the subdued afternoon light that hid the fine lines around her eyes and the corners of her mouth; and when she laughed the likeness between herself and Marigold was very noticeable. Old Hannah brought in the tea-tray, with its gleaming silver and dainty china, and she dropped St. Hubert an old-fashioned curtsy in passing him.

"It was that curtsy, allied to the brogue," Mrs. Gray had once told him, "that finally decided me in her favour. It betrays her nationality, doesn't it?"

Outside, the long afternoon was unfolding deliberately, bathing land and sea in an exquisite radiance.

In the embrasure of the window, with its window-boxes of red geraniums all in bloom, had been placed the oval afternoon tea-table, and out in the garden he could see old Thomas, pottering about, setting out roots and shrubs that had come from Sydney, and patting the brown earth gently as he finished.

The old man was very contented, working there in the warm September sunlight inside the high stone wall, or pausing for a moment to straighten his back, and looking contemplatively over the sea, his faded eyes shaded by one wrinkled hand as brown almost as the freshly-turned mould at his feet.

The gentle, drowsy peace that was part of the day crept into the room also.

It was only two months ago since St. Hubert had paid his first formal call of inquiry, and six weeks only since he had been invited into this room. Often in the lifetime of the Honourable John Oswald had he come here, and for a while afterwards for the sake of the children, deterred only by the fact that Lucy Oswald had been inclined to be what the postmistress would have called "flirtatious."

About this house, however, the atmosphere was different, and almost every day since he had called, for the child had asked pleadingly on his first visit that he would do so, when she lay on the lace-draped couch, so very frail-looking that it seemed a puff of wind might blow her away."

"You will come again, Hugh, dear, won't you?" she had said.

And the query, and her sweet high voice with its

innocent, familiar use of his name, had brought a quivering smile to the mother-face that had been then so very worn and anguished looking.

He glanced at June Gray now over the tea-table, noting that the dark circles under her eyes had disappeared, for the sleepless nights, as pain-filled for the mother-heart as, physically, for the child, were things of the past now.

"I am getting quite, quite well, Hugh," the child would say on each visit. And then, "Could you tell me another fairy-story to-day, do you think?"

And so it came about that, despite the resolution at first that he would call no more, but send one of the servants for the daily bulletin of the child's health, St. Hubert had drifted into the pleasant habit of calling in the afternoon, at least twice or thrice a week.

The fairy stories on his unaccustomed lips had been very strange and weird compositions indeed, at first. He remembered the first laugh that had fallen from the lips of the child's mother and how low and pleasantly it had rippled in the room.

Since then he had steadily advanced in the art of the Tale-teller, and he made the amazing discovery that his stories were brushing off the years from his shoulders, and bringing back the boyish years over

which the shadow of the disgrace of another had hung so long and sombrely.

Some of the atmosphere that surrounded him on these visits he brought home with him ; and to his mother it was as if a blind, long down, had been suddenly thrown up, and long-hidden sunlight flooded the room.

There was always a message for that tender, white-haired old mother who could not call, and it took Marigold a long while to understand that while she very soon would be off her couch and able to run and dance again about the house, Hugh's mother must always remain there, a patient uncomplaining prisoner.

" Always and always ? " the child had asked him.

He had opened his lips to say something, when he caught a look in the mother's eyes. - And it was then that he knew that, at all costs, sorrow and shadow must find no entrance into this child's life.

" Yes, always and always," was all his hesitating answer, and then suddenly he had begun to tell her a wonderful, impromptu fairy-story of the golden dancing daffodils, so that to the child ever afterwards they were her favourite flowers.

Sometimes she, too, would make up little stories ;

the quaintest, most wonderful conceptions of a child-mind, little glowing uncut jewels of thought, strung carelessly on the thin golden chain of fancy ; or as silken skeins, orange and grey, pearl, ruby, bronze, pale purple, and pastel-green, woven into flowers and word-pictures, delicately embroidered and quaint as ancient samplers.

This spacious, shadowy room made a fitting background for the stories.

Heavy deep green velvet hangings, with strange bronze borderings as if they came from foreign countries, were suspended at either end of the long poles of twisted copper that ran the full width of the embrasured window, and through them the red geraniums on the outer sill burned incessantly like steady flame.

The golden brown carpet on the floor was so thick that one walked soundlessly ; oriental lamps swung from the ceilings, giving forth at night a pale yellow radiance that had something in it of the sun ; and the exquisite mingling of deep green and shadowy gold was everywhere, save for the red glow at the window or in the grate, and on the darker mantel a great burnished copper bowl filled with flowers of the same hue. It was so different from the faded Dresden effects that Lucy Oswald

had gathered about her, and whose simpering prettiness matched her own faded beauty.

An easel stood now near the window, bearing a canvas just begun, and near it, on a low stool, a palette still laden with moist paint, as if laid down at sound of the door-bell that had announced his coming.

Across the room was a grand piano, open too, with its evidence of effort to make the days pass sweetly and unwearily for the little child, around whose wishes the whole mechanism of the house seemed to revolve.

The child showed no sign of spoiling, however.

Tea was over.

In the pause of the child's prattle Hugh looked over at the mother, sitting down on the big divan by the fireside, leaning back a little dreamily, half-listening, against a heaped-up pile of golden brown cushions, and her eyes seemingly on the strip of blue sea that swayed beyond the window.

"And so," he went on, inveigled into a new story again, and silently giving up to it the twenty minutes of grace he always allowed to himself after old Hannah and the tray disappeared through the door—"and so, when the Boy Blue Fairy went down the road, he met a man who . . . "

"Was it a Bad man, or a Good man, Hugh?"

He considered. A Bad man's doings would take some considerable time and explanation, and he had a hesitating fear that he might weary the mother if he made his visit too long.

"No, Marigold, this man was a good man, a very good man, indeed."

"I know of a good man," the child said idly, and her mother, still dreamily, smiled at her, only half listening.

"Do you?" Hugh teased with simulated surprise. "Do *you* know a good man?"

He had thought that she would gaily point to him, no longer the ogre.

"I have never seen him," she added gravely, in her sweet, high voice; and her blue eyes looked up at him very seriously, then past him at her mother leaning against the golden brown cushions.

"He was a *very* good man."

"Not really," he said banteringly. "Now, *who* could that possibly be?"

Into her wide, sweet eyes had flickered a smile at his tone, and her little teeth pressed whitely on her short under-lip.

"My father was a good man—and he died," she said clearly and slowly.

She said it in a little sing-song chant, as if she was repeating something that had been told her long since, and as if it held little or no meaning for her. He saw the woman on the divan give a great start, her face whiten, and her hands clench as if in intolerable pain.

She made no sound, but something seemed suddenly to have shattered the stillness in the room, and to shadow its brightness, as if outside the sun had dipped suddenly behind a cloud-bank.

The child's words seemed to echo and re-echo in the room, over and over.

He looked at his watch, and rose abruptly.

"The Boy Blue Fairy must wait until to-morrow, Marigold—or the day after that." His hand rested with a strange tenderness on her head. "Hugh is a very busy farmer at this time of the year, you know."

With a little sigh of relief he saw that the child had forgotten the subject.

"And do *you* work, Hugh?"

"Yes." He fought hard to restore the shattered atmosphere of the room. "I become a big brown gnome in moleskin and leather leggings."

"Couldn't you"—her look beseeched him—"couldn't you stay just the littlest while, Hugh, and

tell me about it, and then I can picture what you are doing when you are not here? You stay such a little while, Hugh, dear."

He hesitated, glancing towards the mother, but she had taken up her embroidery again and her needle sped swiftly in and out of the delicate silk. It was only afterwards that he noticed that a mass of confused colour was all that remained of her work.

"Just five minutes, then"; he pulled his chair nearer the couch, drawing out his pocket-book, and fumbling for a pencil.

"I will draw you a picture of it," he laughed. "Will that do, little Tyrant?"

The child nodded her curls.

"Dearest can draw beautiful pictures. There are a lot on the walls. Some of me, too," she added with pride, and a sense of her mother's superiority over all other painters since the world began.

"This shall be the new fantastic art that everybody is raving about," he assured her. "Prizes, you know, are given to find out what it is all about."

"And don't the painters themselves know?"

"That is a question about which the world is donning its thinking-cap. It has the matter under serious consideration, and I shall let you know when it has come to a definite conclusion."

She smiled at him, recognizing the teasing tone in his voice, and shaking her curls.

The mother lifted her head and looked at him, as if she recognized a more serious note.

"And what is that?"—watching Hugh's pencil as it travelled slowly over the paper.

"That is my house."

She considered it thoughtfully.

"It is a very funny house. Hasn't it got any windows?"

"Oh, yes," several. He sketched in one rapidly, and she looked at it dubiously, deciding with a little sigh that it would be rude to pass remarks about Hugh's house.

"Why did you sigh, Little One?" said the mother.

She had crossed the room and now stood near them, her arm protectingly across the pillow, her face a little pale, but her lips smiling.

"I was feeling very sorry for Hugh. I think he would better live in *this* house."

They both laughed.

"There are more windows—and lots of things," said Hugh, hurriedly, "but that is the game. You must imagine them all."

Marigold rested her cheek on her mother's hand, watching the pencil as it went its way.

"And what is that, Hugh? Is it one of the pigs?"

"Well no, not quite—that, as a matter of fact, is the paddock that has just been ploughed!" He laid down his pencil, taking the criticism with a hearty laugh.

"And that is where the brown furrows come first, Hugh?"

"Yes—furrows—then the green blades . . . like the grass."

"I know." She smiled wisely. "Then it grows high, and turns yellow; then the wheat comes. It goes out into the world"—her voice held the soft, droning note that came whenever a story unfolded itself before her—"and it means food for many people, many very poor people."

The little hands opened and spread palm outwards with a gesture that seemed to signify lavish plenty.

He stared at her little intent face.

"I know all about it." She nodded wisely. "There's little girls like me in the world, and little Boy Blue fairies, only they're not fairies—and—mothers."

She smiled up at the mother-face above hers, and then her eyes flashed back to his.

"And there are men like you," she conceded graciously.

But he was not looking at her, then.

He was seeing something far away . . . something the words had made him see. . . .

The child's hand had gone out to him, and as he turned he surprised a glance, as it were of compassionate understanding in the older face above hers, and it gripped him strangely.

"There are men like you."

The child's words followed him out of the pleasant room and homewards, stirring time-rusted strings in his heart, lifting aside the veil of years.

Had it been that he had thought himself the only man in the world to suffer—that he had bowed down before that now remote tragedy in his life—that he would go on, bent under it? No! He squared his shoulders, and lifted his head as if challenging Fate.

The sea-wind was in his face, and he paused for a moment and faced it, drawing in great breaths as if drawing new life. As he went on his way, he felt as if a great burden had slipped from his shoulders, and that something new and sweet was entering into his life.

The road to the Homestead no longer seemed dreary and God-forsaken; he strode on, his shoulders squared, the sea-wind in his face.

The Widow of Gray House, going to the window

a moment afterwards, saw him walking along the sunlit road, his tall, well-knit figure clearly outlined against the blue glory of the sea.

She stood for a moment looking after him as he went.

"He, too, has suffered," she said to herself; and something in her heart quivered and softened and went out to him in the comradeship of sympathy and understanding.

CHAPTER IX

" I SHALL ASK YOU AGAIN "

There is an Hour that comes with folded hands,
And eyes grown sweet with widowed memories,
And wistful lips, long curved to laughter, sad as tears—
And in this Hour are garnered all the years. . . .

ALL the gold and russet of the trailing end of
Summer held Gray Cliff still in glorious
bondage.

The leaves of the poplars in the one crooked street
were slowly turning yellow and dry, ready to drift
loose and flutter away when the first trumpet note
of the north wind should herald Autumn. There
was an opalescent softness even in the greyness of
the stretch of thinly-wooded country that spread
desolately as far as the eye could see.

" Summer is passing, Little One," said the mother
a little sadly, as Thomas wheeled Marigold's chair
into the morning sunlight.

" I love Autumn, Dearest," answered the child

dreamily. "All the fairies seem to spill their gold and copper coins in Autumn."

"It is a month that holds but a fairy meaning for youth," said St. Hubert at the gate, looking in for a moment in passing, and making elaborate obeisance. "Good morning, Queen of the Flowers."

She waved a great golden sheaf of fading blossoms at him. "I walked all over the garden this morning," she cried proudly. "I could walk all day if I were let."

"You have made a good beginning," he conceded graciously. "And where did you get the Autumn-bracken?"

"You would never, never guess," she said breathlessly. "Just think, Hugh, where *could* it come from?"

He glanced at a corner of the garden, where, by the grey sea-wall in a patch of sunlight, daffodils had grown lavishly, but where now only withered stalks remained.

"No." She followed his glance triumphantly.

"From the churchyard?"

A vivid picture of the neglected churchyard attached to the old Roman Catholic Church came before him, where, by the broken gateway, the daffodils and the bracken every year were a blaze of gold.

" No."

" Miss Primrose . . . old Ben . . . any of your numerous admirers? " He came forward, playing up to her impressive air of mystery.

The little face peered roguishly out at him from under the silken hood, the pale gold of her hair mingling with the deeper yellow of the bracken on her lap.

Over her head the mother smiled at him, with that still, remote air that seemed always as an invisible barrier between them. St. Hubert bent one knee in mock homage like a courtier of old.

" I am being consumed with curiosity," he said, laughingly. " Tell me before I vanish."

" Like the parachute fairy—up into the clouds? " added Mrs. Gray slyly.

He laughed again.

" Well—they came—from the Manor," said Marigold, drawling out the words to give them the length their importance demanded.

" The Manor? " He turned to the mother, and it seemed to her that a shadow slipped over his face. " Then Mrs. Oswald is back again? "

" I don't think so," she answered. " One of the men-servants brought some flowers and fruit, with the intimation that they were from ' Miss Rosa.'

She will be a grown-up daughter, no doubt? "

" Oh, no. Rosa is only a little girl, about a year older than Marigold, I should think. The children must be home on holidays, and have heard from Miss Primrose of Marigold's existence."

"It was very sweet of her to send the flowers."

" Then she is a little girl like me," cried Marigold.

" A little girl," he answered gravely, " but not quite like you, Marigold. They say there are never two little girls alike, you know."

" Do you think she would come to see me "

The child hung breathlessly on his words, and something in the eagerness of her voice brought a sudden flickering shadow to her mother's eyes.

" Yes, she will assuredly come," he answered lightly. " So you will have to rest all you can, so that you can get well quickly, and be able to show her where the fairies hide around Gray Cliff."

" Doesn't she know about them? " Her eyes gravely searched his face.

" I'm afraid Rosa may be a very modern product," he answered enigmatically ; but the mother seemed to understand.

She walked with him slowly down the sea-shell pathway to the gate.

Under the shadow of the old sea-wall she stooped and gathered some belated violets.

"They are the last of the season," she said. "Tell your mother that very soon, now, Marigold will be coming to see her."

"And could you not come in the meantime?" he asked. "You have been indoors so very much. Now that the child is almost well, you should have outdoor exercise."

As she stood before him in the brilliant sunlight, her hair a little loosened about her face, she looked very young and girlish, St. Hubert thought, too young to be living such a conventual existence in that great house.

The swift thought brought with it a swifter heart-beat, and a sudden warm thrilling at his heart that left him trembling. He glanced quickly at her, but she was not looking at him, but back at the child, on her face that tender, brooding look, and in her eyes a serene peace that seemed to lift her above the things of the world.

Late that afternoon, when the hour was mellowing into dusk, he came upon her walking briskly along the beach road.

At the bend of the road old Ben had passed her, raising his quaint fisherman's hat, and she had

stopped and spoken a word or two, as was her wont ever since that dread, never-to-be-forgotten night. There were many ways in which she proved that she did not forget the bravery and kind-heartedness of those rough fisher folk, many ways by which the little fisher-children benefited.

When she saw St. Hubert she paused, and waited for him.

"I have taken your advice you see," she said, laughingly. "I have graciously allowed myself one hour. You look as if you had been somewhere."

He wore a peaked motor-cap and an automobile coat, that was splashed here and there with mud, and he had evidently just come up from Gray Cliff Post Office.

"Yes, I've a motor-bike, you know, and it's handy for the country road to Colbourne."

"You couldn't use it on this road?" with a glance at the twisting, boulder-strewn cliff-road. "The doctor's chauffeur must have had great courage on that terrible night."

She shuddered, and her eyes shadowed with a fleeting memory.

"Yes." He turned and walked at her side. "You have been to Colbourne, I suppose?"

"Only on the day I came to Gray Cliff, and then

I saw hardly anything of it except the main street that led to and from the station. There is only a wait of a few minutes before the train passes through to Gray Cliff, so it left little or no impression on my mind."

" To what a hermit-like existence you condemn yourself ! " he said involuntarily.

She turned her face away, looking at the sea, and walking more slowly, and he saw that she bit her lips.

" Some people prefer a quiet life," she said after a while. Her voice was not quite steady. " When . . . my husband . . . died . . . the world seemed to have no longer any interest for me. There . . . was only my child to live for. I saw a picture and advertisement of this place . . . and it suited my mood. I wanted my child to grow up quite—quite unworldly—a convent existence, as it were, and yet with the advantage of knowledge that few nuns possess."

It was the first time she had ever spoken to him of her husband.

A little silence grew and deepened between them.

" I am sorry," he began, " that I —— "

" No, no," she interrupted him. " The question was inevitable. People must wonder, even in a

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small place like this, that any woman would elect to shut herself up as I do, and not have any inclination for the small social events that to them are all-important."

Her words were half-questioning.

He answered, after almost imperceptible hesitation—

"They knew instinctively that you were a widow, and guessed that you had come here for rest and quiet. Believe me, they are all deeply sympathetic in spite of the curiosity that is always part of small places like these."

She was staring at the sea, her face a little pale, and a shadow in her eyes.

A flight of gulls circled out from the cliffs, and drifted away into a white flashing line.

They both stood watching the birds, neither speaking; but once, unconsciously, she sighed, as if for the moment forgetting his presence.

He had seen her face in the charm of its changing beauty many times; had been fascinated by her soft musical voice; had grown, during the last months of daily meetings at the Gray House, to know her thoroughly, he told himself, and to understand her self-effacing nature, that had no touch of narrowness or bitterness about it; he had basked

in the calm serenity of her presence ; but he felt, for the first time, as if he had caught a glimpse of tragedy.

To him, ever since that night when he had carried her to her room, she had been associated with the tender, purple violets. She seemed, like them, to disseminate fragrance and serenity : out of the one tragedy of her life, the engrossing sorrow of her husband's death, she had plucked peace in her retirement as the shrinking violets pluck sweetness in the quiet paths of life.

They walked on in silence, and on her lifted face came back again slowly that familiar, rapt expression.

At the bend of the cliff-road they paused, where, to the left, the road swept out to the grey levels of the country, and through the eucalypti flashed the red-painted roof of St. Hubert's house, with the smoke curling languidly up from the chimneys.

He looked at her as she gazed across the infinite spaces of the rippled sea, and it seemed to him that in her eyes grew a passion of rapture and longing, her absorption being so complete that he felt it sacrilege to break in on her reverie.

She turned to him at last with a little start, and a smile.

"I love the sea," she said apologetically and

posal, but I had just finished my articles, and was ready to embark on my professional career. I would have liked to have seen Rome. You, of course, would go there?"

"Yes," her voice was very low. "Oh, yes."

"I should imagine that one would ever afterwards carry the memory of the Eternal City with one. Is it as gloriously beautiful as brush and pen declare?"

"I do not think so," she spoke very slowly. "There is nothing very interesting about old Rome. It looks much better in pictures, or when one reads about it, and imagination has full play. This is noticeably so in the case of the Colosseum, and also in that of St. Peter's. From no point of view in Rome does the latter stand out to any advantage. . . . I was there," she added, "on two Easter Sundays."

"It was packed to the doors, I am sure." His voice rose in its enthusiasm. "You will always find our Catholic papers describe the magnificent gatherings of devout worshippers."

She smiled, with an almost imperceptible curling of her firm upper lip.

"Oh, yes. And one knows then that none of the writers could have been there, unless the two

Easter Sundays that I saw in Rome are to be counted as unique occasions. There were very few people there, and the trail of the tourist," she added, "was over it all."

"I should have imagined from written descriptions that they would have been all on their knees "

She smiled.

"Most of them were frankly discussing the ceremony," she answered—"and with an appalling frankness. The Italians themselves, who, you no doubt know, have little or no faith in the Church now, were wandering about, watching the tourists curiously. There was no sign of the immense crowd of worshippers that our papers feel it a duty to ladle out as a news-item every year. I counted five people on their knees, in that vast building the others just wandered about, pausing here or there a moment. The confessional boxes along the wall had each a waiting priest. I spent several hours there, but I did not see anyone, however, going to confession, although over each box was written the name and nationality of each confessor. Most of the nuns stood around collecting for the Lourdes Miracle. They have a habit in Italy of meeting the boats, holding out their hands for alms. They are much more persistent than the nuns here."

He looked distressed.

"And in the afternoon," she went on, "there was just a mere handful of people there, although a continuous service was on, and also the Cardinals' procession. It was the first time I had seen the latter."

"Was it very interesting?"

"Yes . . . in some ways. First a group of about eleven choristers gathered together, apparently exchanging jokes, to judge by their smiles, as about twenty people in all formed an interested circle around them. Then came the Cardinals, robed in vivid purple, and short white over-dress with a profusion of lace, that, on account of the obesity of the majority, stood out all around their figures, very much like a lamp-shade."

"The procession then, you think, lacked solemnity."

"Decidedly, yes. There was none of the dignity I expected to see. To me, as a thinking Roman Catholic, it was a very pitiable thing to see—that sparse procession, practically ignored, making its way out of St. Peter's, and returning again, to the amusement rather than the edification of the sight-seers. A very old priest, nay, if I remember rightly, a Cardinal, with a palm-branch in his hand, sprinkled

the procession with holy-water as each one passed him. The whole thing seemed to lack reverence, as if the heart had gone out of it altogether, and it was simply an obsolete and meaningless ceremony."

"That is very sad," he said thoughtfully, after a long pause.

She glanced up at him quickly, an incomprehensible look in her brown eyes.

"The spirit of religion has long passed from the Church, I am afraid," she said, a little mournfully.

"I think," he said, "that, after all, the Church is at its best in Australia, at its highest moral standard also."

"In comparison with the criminal statistics of those countries where the Church is strongest, since the institution of the Penal Code in regard to priests, yes, indeed." She turned her face away. "But Australia, of course, is four-fifths Protestant."

"I think conditions are much different here," he said hopefully. "I think the Church here is recognizing that, and without publicity is endeavouring to break away from Rome. Do you notice how a Roman Catholic nowadays is insulted if you use the prefix 'Roman'?"

"I thought that the word Catholic was exclusively used by Anglicans and Ex-Catholics," she said.

" Maybe the last statistical returns and losses to the Church have an influence on the removal of the prefix. The next census should be interesting and hopelessly muddled. The Church loses a great many adherents, indeed."

Her eyes, that with one slender hand she shielded from the sun, held a strange, wistful look.

Perhaps distant memories floated to her over that radiant, rippling stretch of water ; the glow of the East, the soft dun-yellow sheen of the desert, the languid swishing of the Nile, or palm-trees etched against a gorgeous sunset of flame and orange. Perhaps she heard again the haunting, musical cry, caught in a dim, purple dusk, "*Allah hu Achbar, Allah hu Achbar*," the song of the dance-girls, or the muezzin of the mosque calling to prayer, and the splashing of the water in the fountain by a group of olive trees.

" *Là ilàha illa-llàh*," she found herself saying softly ; then came back with a start to find but the great cliffs frowning out over blue peaceful waters, with the open country in the background, the sage-green trees and shrubs and grass, the road winding as far as the eye could see across them, and over all the steely sun-shimmer, quivering spirally upwards.

Life, like the East, called her, in all its glow and beauty, with all its ambitions ! And there came, too, the haunting thoughts of everything renounced and thrust aside—for this, for a road winding across a desolate grey country, a road that went on and on, winding through a clump of trees here, a great stretch of barren, sandy plain there, and on into the mist of distance. A side-road of life that held only herself and her child !

Then the thought of that little child swept back to her, and love gave a wonderful wealth of colour and beauty to all that was bare, gave light and colour to all that sometimes seemed desolate and strangely empty.

Years ahead, the road of the future would open out into new issues, new meaning, in which sorrow would have no place.

These were but Years of Forgetting—afterwards, when she had *quite* forgotten, would come the Years of Happiness.

She closed her eyes and saw the Future Road, saw the child Marigold on that road, herself the helper and guardian in the background.

"There must be, of course," St. Hubert was saying, reverting to the former topic, "an air of great solemnity about St. Peter's itself."

He bent his head with the reverence of the Roman Catholic who sees the Rome of his dreams, and the priestly teachings of childhood that present Rome as the hub of the world, and that world on its knees in adoration of the Pope, who was very God, in the place of God.

"That is what there is not," she answered earnestly. "The congregation walked about, talked as loudly as if they were out in the streets, and openly discussed everything they saw. Near me, a sight-seer voiced the evident opinion of the crowd there, by saying, as the Cardinals' procession passed: '*Absolutely out of date. They want something more modern nowadays.*' By his accent he was unmistakably an American, and by the cross he conspicuously wore on his watch chain, a Roman Catholic or Ritualist."

"And—what did *you* think? Do you mind me asking?" He turned towards her, unable to see her face for her shielding hand and the grey motor veil that floated between them.

"I—oh, I never thought very much about it at all." Her voice was inexpressibly weary. "I'm afraid I'm like the majority of Roman Catholics, who don't bother to think at all, but just drift acquiescently on the tide of least resistance. 'Thought

breeds doubt,' is an old saying, and a very true one.'

His answer was the silence of admission and understanding.

She straightened herself, and was looking now over her shoulder, at the little town lying in the misty hollow, its faint yellow lights beginning to break through the dusk, all familiar sounds muffled by distance—a dog barking, the laughter of school-children, the sound of wheels on the metalled road.

The sea-wind blew freshly yet languidly in their faces.

The sky turned from rose to gold, to azure, to misty purple.

The silence deepened, with a deepening sense also of *camaraderie*.

A puff of wind came and set her grey gown fluttering, and loosened a curling strand of her hair; it blew against his face, and she put up her hand, and accidentally it touched his face, and all at once St. Hubert looked at her and forgot what he was going to say.

The grey intimacy of the dusk seemed to have drawn them nearer, this man and woman, standing by a broken sea-wall, she gazing over the illimitable ocean with what thoughts he knew not, he standing there, with the sudden knowledge that a flood of light

had broken across the dull sequence of his days.

It was in this mood that the reserve of years slipped away and that suddenly he began to speak of the past, to speak of the years of dogged persistence, to unwind the tightly-wound skein of his sorrow.

Now with a strange gladness he saw that its threads crumbled at a touch, that it was but useless fluff that had accumulated in these years of forgetting, clogging his mind, obscuring truer vision.

The shame and sorrow of his wife's creating seemed to drop suddenly from him as a garment, and he stood out from it, free, unfettered, the paths of the world at his feet.

June had looked up at him thus, with sombre eyes, a catch in her breath as he stood, his shoulders squared, his fine, rather ugly face transfigured.

"I feel, as I have not felt for years, a free man," he said again, as he concluded.

Her hands were unconsciously playing with the miniature at her breast, and the thin, slender chain glimmered in the light.

"I thought men always felt free," she said. "I—somehow I did not think they had very much capacity for suffering. We women believe that—that only women can truly know the meaning of suffering."

"I think women brood more over their wrongs," he said, thoughtfully.

"To a woman," she amended, gravely, "a wrong means the absolute blasting of her life. How far the attitude of the world is to blame for that is a question often discussed, never settled. Unequal laws for men and women cause untold suffering and degradation to the weaker sex. The word shame has no social meaning for a man. He can turn his back on even the most despicable action, if it be associated with the other sex, and the world assures him that he is quite right."

"But do you not think that some women go on their knees to sorrow?"

She pondered a moment, looking over the dusky waters.

"No. It is all a question of how deeply the woman may have suffered. Her sorrow may have been of such tremendous violence that it drove her to her knees, absolutely crippled her so that she might never arise and walk in the same paths of life again. She would be a maimed and broken thing for all the rest of her life. Superficial natures, of course, can only know superficial suffering."

"One can't always judge feeling by appearances, especially with women," he said, meditatively.

"No," she sighed ; " you are right."

A white gull rose out of the shadows of the cliff, and wheeled silently by them.

Her eyes followed it unseeingly.

Her delicate, lifted profile, very pale in the dusk-light, was as serene as he always pictured her. If this woman suffered in any way, she had schooled her features well, almost too well ; for the straight brow, the proud nose, the firmly chiselled lips, neither too thin nor too full, and the firm, imperious chin were modelled *coldly* as if from marble.

It was her eyes only that mirrored her thoughts ; yet he had seen the curious transfiguration of her face as she bent over the child, or spoke of her, the Galatean awakening of life, that gave to her such radiant beauty.

Some new current of consciousness seemed suddenly to creep and tingle through her being, for she turned swiftly, a faint flush on her face.

"It is growing perilously near the dinner-hour," she said, " and Marigold will be preparing a scolding for me. I meant to walk miles, and I have come no farther than this."

She turned, where she leaned against the sea-wall, and looking towards the Gray House, smiled her faint, grave smile.

Suddenly a light flashed out in the window like a star. Its reflection seemed mirrored in her eyes as she held out her hand.

"I must go now," she said. And then the warm colour rushed suddenly to her face, for St. Hubert had bent impulsively forward and taken both her hands in his.

"Will you let me tell you some day," he said in a low voice, "how much your friendship has been to me, and how much it means to me? The road of Life is unrolling before us both, and mine is a very lonely road. Dear little woman, I have told you everything, and that I am free—free." His voice had a new exulting note that she had never heard, something deeper in it thrilled her heart suddenly, yet distressed her.

He had let her hands go, and for a moment she buried her face in them.

"You, too, must be lonely when all is said." He drew her hands gently away from her face. "Dear, would you marry me?"

She made no move to withdraw them, but the colour had gone from her face, leaving it very white.

"No . . . no," she whispered; and again, more steadily, "I live only for my child. I have consecrated my life to the making of her happiness."

"Cannot I help?" he asked her. "You are only a child yourself."

She was fumbling at her loose veil with unsteady fingers.

He took the two ends and tied it loosely under her chin, with an air of mastery and protection that sat well on him, and that set her pulses beating. He smiled at her, a radiant, enfolding smile, and under it her eyes grew dark and wistful.

They stood side by side in silence for a moment.

"Some day, June," he said, his voice low and deeply stirred, "I shall ask you again."

Wordless, with a little negative shake of her head, she had gone, the white road slipping lightly under her quick feet.

He stood by the old sea-wall, looking after her as she went, a slim, grey-clad figure in the opalescent light.

In the dark looming bulk of the house that topped the cliff-path shone out yellowly the star of light.

"I will take it as an omen," he said to himself.

CHAPTER X

EXPLANATIONS

A coward I, afraid to look
At Lover's Lane again,
Lest in my heart memory awake
An old love's joy and pain.

IN the garden at Gray House the air was ringing with childish laughter, where Marigold and the two Oswald children played happily.

To Marigold life seemed suddenly to be a wonderful and joyous thing ; she had never known how the little child-heart of her had instinctively longed for playmates until the day that ushered Rosa and Gerald into her world.

Rosa, with her dark straight hair that the costliest treatment or brushing would never make glossy or curly, and her small, rather plain but clever face, became a wonderful being. Rosa was three years older than Marigold ; she scorned fairy stories, and her little tip-tilted nose would tilt higher at the

very suggestion of Santa Claus; but she was an honest little soul who had promised Mrs. Gray faithfully that when Marigold spoke of the fairies she would not just yet break her illusions.

"There is time enough yet, Childie," had explained the mother with her hand on Rosa's head, and she had bent and kissed the child, who had as yet little affection in her life, whereat Rosa's heart had gone out to her in a great rush of long-stifled affection.

Gerald was quieter, although he, too, romped in the garden when once the first strangeness was over.

There was a great deal of the Honourable John Oswald in his little son, St. Hubert had often averred.

"His old protecting air, and adoration for Marigold, make me smile," St. Hubert said this morning, looking down from the window of the study where old Hannah had just ushered him. "He is so very grandfatherly. The children go back to school next week, so I am afraid Marigold is going to miss them."

"Marigold is never lonely." A shadow swept on to her mother's face, then away again as swiftly.

He comprehended that there had been a note of jealousy in her voice.

The smile that transfigured her face broke over it

again as she heard the child's laugh, followed by Rosa's quiet, shrill little voice.

She had been deep in her painting when St. Hubert had entered, in answer to the absently-spoken admittance.

It was one of those half-dull days that herald in rain, but the morning air was as yet keen and dry, after the scarce days of sunshine that break the greyness of midwinter.

Mrs. Gray had hesitated a little as he entered : it was the first time that she had seen him alone since that dusky hour by the sea-wall, and she felt the colour creep warmly to her face.

If he had been conscious of her avoidance of the past few weeks he had shown no sign of it, being that strong, new, boyish self she had come to know and deeply admire ; and the old camaraderie, with the unseen barrier that forbade further encroachment, existed again between them.

She put down her brushes as he came nearer.

" I can't shake hands with you," she said, " until I get the paint off. I always manage to get nearly as much paint on my hands as on the canvas, somehow."

He had looked at the painting.

" Why, you are doing Rosa's portrait."

"Yes," she smiled, happily. "Don't you think it a good portrait? I consider it one of my successes. It is only an impression, for, you see, I want it to be a surprise for her?"

"Then she doesn't sit for it?"

"Oh, no! You see, it is only the face, the expression. I shut my eyes and see it very plainly. I often do impressions of people like that, if the vision of them is clear and retentive."

"Please don't let me interrupt you," he begged, as she rose.

"I've finished, really, for to-day. Will you excuse me while I wash my hands?"

She had gone into an inner room, and a moment later he heard the splashing of water, and, once, her voice, as she lifted up the window and called out happily to the children laughing in the garden below.

Left alone to himself, instead of going down to the sitting-room as usual, he wandered around the studio, looking at the many canvases, some of them only half-finished, or barely begun, others ready for framing and stacked against the wall, as by one who painted just for the sheer joy of reproducing the beauty of nature in its varied moods.

There were many copies of Marigold, one a deli-

cately lovely inspiration of a child with a sheaf of marigolds in her arms, so life-like that the child herself seemed to peer at him out of the picture.

He was turning away when he caught sight of a framed panel on the wall, with a slender brass rod and hidden with silk curtains. Idly he lifted the curtain aside, then stood still, letting them fall again, realizing that he had trespassed on sacred ground. The face of the man in the picture was curiously but marvellously painted, breaking through a mist, as it were, with the eyes dominating the picture and the rest of the face blending into the mist ; but the likeness to Marigold was unmistakable, strikingly apparent.

It gave him a curious sense of shock, he knew not why, and there came with that fleeting glimpse of the face a haunting, elusive memory.

He was about to look more closely, conscious that somewhere, somehow, he had met or seen the man who stared coldly out of the framed canvas, when he heard her step in the other room.

When she came in she found him standing by the window looking out at the sea far below, a puzzled frown on his brow.

"I thought you had gone down," she said.
"A penny for your thoughts."

"I was only striving to trail an elusive memory of something long forgotten." They were going down the narrow, twisted stairway that led to the second floor.

She turned, smiling back at him.

"That is an Irishism, isn't it? There could not be a forgotten memory, could there?"

Down in the drawing-room, with its wondrous blending of shades, she had caught him frowning suddenly.

"Still on the trail?" she had asked lightly, bending over the tea-tray, the soft delicate laces falling softly at her wrists, her russet-red gown harmonizing with the many-toned bronze and grey green cushions behind her, and her hair catching redly all the light of the window behind her.

He laughed, then, with a shake of his head, as if thrusting away the faint haunting memory.

"I have given it up," he said.

"What was it?" She passed the delicate afternoon cup to him, with its fragrant burden of freshly-made tea. "Anything very particular?"

"No—just a memory," he said, with an eager note in his voice she could not quite understand. "Memories are nearly always evanescent."

"How boyish you are sometimes," she said frankly. "You are like a ray of the sun on a dull day."

"And you," he said, "are the sun."

"No flattery," she laughed nervously. "Ring the bell for Hannah, will you? We've forgotten the hot-buttered scones."

"Where are the children?" he asked, when the tea-tray had vanished and they had descended to talk of commonplace things.

"They are having a tea-party of their own. Thomas has rigged up the summer-house for them, and they play that they are grown-ups. Rosa is the hostess to-day. I notice she has conferred the title of the Countess of Something or Other on herself for the occasion."

"And what is Gerald?"

"I believe he is just the footman. Gerald hasn't the sense of dignity that Rosa has."

"She will be very like her mother, I think."

She had gone over to a divan heaped up with cushions that was near the window.

"You have never told me anything about her," she said interestedly.

"You never asked before," he reminded her; and then he frowned.

He seated himself on a low chair near by. "Now, what would you like to know about her ladyship, as every one calls her?"

"I am not sure that I want very particularly to know anything," she confessed. "However, I will ask a woman's first question: Is she pretty?"

He considered.

"Well, yes. I have heard many people describe her as pretty. She is of the very fair Dresden type, a little faded, although it seemed to me last time I saw her that her hair was even fairer. That, however, is a secret of perennial youth of which you ladies hold the key."

She shook her head at him reprovingly.

"I suppose she is very clever, takes interest in the deeper topics of to-day. Is she a militant suffragette? I think you—somebody—mentioned that she was in England."

"Ah, no," with a wry smile. "You wouldn't exactly describe her as a bookworm, or blue-stocking, or even with pretensions to Holloway Jail as the consummation of a voteless career. I am afraid that I must leave her description to the testimony of your own eyes. She is already on her way homewards, from a letter I received recently."

She looked at him quickly.

"Then she writes to . . . I mean, do you think she will call on me?"

"Most certainly," he said. "I think you will find her likeable in many ways."

She was silent for a moment, her eyes a little distressed, it seemed to him, though the strong, sweet outline of her face had still its appearance of calm absorption; only her hands were a little restless, playing with the slender chain of the miniature she always wore. He wondered now, as he had often wondered of late, whose portrait the oval silver case contained--two portraits, probably, one of Marigold most certainly, the other--that of the painted face of her husband, hidden by its silken curtain?

His gaze went around the pictures on the high walls.

There were many good pictures there, but no portraits save of Marigold, and one of the child and herself that she told him she had one day painted with the aid of a mirror.

He looked at her for a moment as she sat against the background of grey glass, the scarlet geraniums on the window-sill flaming beside her. The thought of that silk-hid picture in the studio brought back the haunting memory that eluded him just as his mind seemed to pounce on it, and it brought also a

surging tide of jealousy, that sent him impetuously to her side.

The colour deepened sensitively in her cheek, and she moved nervously.

"What a grey day it is becoming," she said, merely for the sake of saying something. "How dead the sea looks in this cloud-light! Shall we go down to the garden and see the children?"

"Not unless you do not wish to speak to me," he said gently. "Are you afraid of me?"

He looked keenly at her flushing, sensitive face.

"Afraid?" Her colour mounted high. "Why should I be afraid of you?" She held her head proudly, seeming ill at ease, however.

"You have no need," he assured her gravely, and sat down on the couch, so near her that he could take in his hand the long tasselled ends of the silken sash, that fell in long lines from her waist.

He turned the tiny tassels in his fingers, without any sign of intrusion or intimacy.

"I must say what is in my heart, June," he said almost sadly, using her name almost unconsciously. "You are the woman whom I love, and I hope and pray you are not indifferent to me. . . ."

"Please—please——" she said softly, miserably. "I—I have already told you all I can say. Hugh,

let us be friends, dear, true friends as we are. Your friendship means—a great deal to me.”

She turned her face away, looking a little despairingly over the grey waters beyond the window.

“Dear,” he said, his voice strong and resolute, thrilling with tenderness, “my love for you is a very deep and steadfast thing, steadily growing, desirous of doing everything that will make for your happiness. Sometimes”—he was twisting and untwisting the scarlet sash in his pliant fingers—“sometimes the thought comes to me, when I am away from you, that you are not as happy as you seem.”

She made a little motion, but did not speak or turn, and after a while he went on.

“Perhaps it is the thought of this lonely, storm-battered house that accentuates my feeling. It is a very lonely existence for a woman ; and again, dear, when a man is very deeply, and very truly, in love with a woman, it is only natural that his dominating desire is to shield and guard her ; and his dominating hope is that the woman, no matter how indifferent she is, will ultimately turn to him in his ever present hope, battling against immense odds. It is not conceit—only hope. So, even though I can see that you do not love me, yet I look into a future when you may do so, because you have shown me proof of that

camaraderie which I hope and trust is the stepping-stone to a deep and lasting affection. Only one thing could quench that spark of hope."

She sat quite silent, but the colour in her cheeks had faded slowly and left her very, very pale, and the still calm of her face broken.

"Not until you tell me that you care for some one else, that I have come into your life too late, and that there is not the slightest chance that you will ever care for me, not until then will I cease to hope. That is a man's way, June," he said, half-smiling.

She sat straight, staring sightlessly at the spattered pane, unknowing even that the rain was beginning to fall, unheeding and unhearing the ecstatic cries of the children in the summer-house as if the rain fell for their special delectation.

Her thoughts were flying to and fro, a shuttle weaving the threads of the present into the warp of the past, and thoughts broke across the mirror of her face as a flung stone ripples the water.

"Unless you tell me, definitely and once for all, that you care for some one else, that I am too late . . ." he repeated. Then he dropped the silken scarlet sash, that trailed from him as she moved to face him.

He saw then that her face was very white, and that her lips were quivering.

He walked the length of the room, and then came back to her.

His strong face, looking down on her, was very tender.

Suddenly she felt what it would have been to have been this man's wife, guarded, loved, honoured . . . she thrust all these thoughts from her as swiftly as they came, trying to face him with the honest affection that was hers to give, that, and no more.

He paused in front of her, his own face pale.

"June," he said gently. "Is it that you love some one else?"

She did not flinch then, nor turn her eyes away, but her eyes darkened with a flickering light in them as if tears were not far away.

"I am very sorry," she said at last. "Hugh, I can give you no more than I give you now; once—I loved, very dearly," she was unable to say more.

"Your husband?" he asked in a low voice.

She nodded, her hands playing restlessly with the slender chain of the miniature.

"I—I don't think I could ever care for anyone else, Hugh. If I did, I know of no man to whom I could give—what is left of my heart—but you."

"I would be content with that," he urged gently, but she shook her head.

For a moment her eyes had held an unutterable misery that amazed and shook him to the very heart, like to that of a dumb animal passing through indescribable torture.

"No, it is too late," she said brokenly.

"*Not* too late surely, dear." He bent over her, holding out his hands, greatly moved. "Let me help you to forget. Fretting cannot bring back the dead to life again."

"But—if—he—is—not dead." The words had come hoarsely, one by one, slowly, dropping dully on his consciousness like clods on a coffin.

He sprang to his feet, white to the lips.

"June . . . what do you mean? In the name of God, what do you mean?"

She put one shaking hand over her eyes, leaning heavily against the divan as if she needed all possible support.

"Do you mean . . . June, is your husband not dead, then?"

"He—is not dead." Her answer was but a whisper.

His mouth set deeply in an enduring line. All the old sorrowful lines seemed to come back, intensified by their absence of the last year, but it was the only change in him.

He stood rigidly still for a moment that seemed years, then dropped into the seat near her without a word.

The scarlet sash lay near him, trailing its length across the cushioned divan, and he looked at it dully.

Then, after a while, he said half aloud—

“Why—do you mind telling me, June, why did you leave him?”

“I did not leave him,” she answered very wearily.
“He—left me.”

“Left you—and the child?” He repeated it blankly.

“Yes.”

A shroud of grief seemed to enfold her for a moment, crushing her very soul, and when she lifted her face it was, during that first second, as the face of one who has looked on Hell.

It was as if the vivid girlish beauty were wiped off it with a swift sponge, leaving only in its place a haggard, suffering mask.

He felt suddenly as if he were looking at the real woman for the first time.

She turned her delicate, tortured face to the window, her hand still over her eyes.

“But why?—why?” he said at last, forgetting in

this hour that it was not for him, or anyone, to ask any more.

"June, for God's sake, tell me. I am thinking of Marigold's words, I have thought of them often: '*My father is a good man . . . and . . . he died.*'"

She did not turn.

"It was not true," she said dully. "Every one else, perhaps, would call him good. Only I . . . who knew him, as no other woman knew him, can know how great a lie . . . his life was. He left me to starve . . . left me . . . and my little baby."

"June . . . June . . . !"

"It is quite true," she said wearily, and for a moment she could not go on. "Providence ordained that Fortune knocked at my door just when everything seemed blackest. It did not matter for me, but . . . for my baby . . . my tiny, tiny baby . . ." She could not go on. The past seemed to have swept over her, engulfing her, brushing aside the Years of Forgetting as if they had not been.

"The scoundrel," Hugh muttered through his teeth, "the dastardly scoundrel."

He seemed to look forward to that future with her, and yet not with her eyes, to see suffering of which she did not, could not speak.

"*Left her to starve!*" she said.

His hands clenched.

"Where is he now?" His voice did not sound to him like his own.

"I do not know," she said. "I do not know."

"Then—you did not try—to get him back?"

"Oh, Hugh," she cried with a burst of tears.

"Is it any use to kneel and cry after Love when it has already gone from sight, and—he had left me to starve! Over and over again I said that to myself, knowing, as you cannot know, the circumstances, circumstances that nearly drove me to desperation, that would have surely ended my life, had I not to live for my baby's sake."

She was weeping softly now, the tears falling on her hands, piteously quiet now in her lap.

"If I had been the kind of woman to court notoriety, to—to . . . oh, there was nothing else to do but live through it, not daring to look at the days, but just second by second live on. And I could not stop loving him . . . *then* . . . just because he thought it best . . . to treat me as he did."

"Thought it best." There was a note in his voice she had never heard. "The cur! He should have been shot."

She gave a great start, and her face went white, drained absolutely of all colour.

" I . . . I did think of that." Her hands moved in her lap gropingly. " It . . . was so terrible for me. Nothing in front of me . . . nothing behind me. Hugh, is it not a terrible thing to say, that, even still, I keep an old revolver? "

" But . . . you . . . "

" Oh, no." She interrupted him quickly, and straightened herself. " No, it is all past, Hugh, the bitterness, and the despair, and the crushing horror of the loneliness, and . . . God gave me my child."

" God gave me my child ! "

The words, pulsing through the room, brought her back quickly to herself, and when he looked at her face again, he saw on it the familiar quietude ; but now it came to him that it was no longer pride or coldness, but the impress of an insistent sorrow that seemed always to enshroud her personality.

" Does it make you very unhappy? " he asked quietly.

She shook her head negatively, but he felt as if it was the challenging spirit in her that answered, the spirit that had dominated a sorrow which would have irretrievably blighted the life of another woman, and now cried out that life was still worth living, for the child's sake.

For the child's sake !

How much indeed hinged on that little laughing child !

How much indeed had she come to mean to the mother !

And in the future would she make up to the mother for all that was past ?

He stirred uneasily. Who could tell how a child would develop, whether she would inherit the nature of the mother, or that of the father, in spite of all her training ?

He thought of that grim night on the beach when they had believed that morning would bring the little bruised and broken body to shore ; and at the thought, he was silent.

" Why, it is raining," said June suddenly. " Marigold . . . the children . . . " But even as she spoke there was the sound of laughter filling the hall, and delighted childish voices, as they scrambled the stairs, and tumbled rather than walked into the room.

" Hugh, we've been in the rain," cried Marigold. " Rosa and I ran out in turns, and Gerald scolded us."

" And Gerald was right," said Hugh.

" Marigold, you're quite wet—and you too,

Rosa." In a moment she had gathered them under her wing, once more the maternal instinct uppermost. "Dry clothes at once, Hannah."

"Gerald wanted to tell on us," panted Rosa.

"And why didn't you, old man?" said Hugh, patting the lad's head, on his way out of the door after making his adieux.

"It wouldn't be sporting, sir," frankly, with a touch of the Honourable John about him, that brought back vivid memory to St. Hubert.

It was three hours later that the Widow of Gray House came back to the drawing-room, where a fire still burned.

Dinner was over; the wagonette had called for the Oswald children; and Marigold, tired out with the day, was sleeping warmly and happily.

The wind had risen, and now and again it tore in great gusts around the house, rattling at the windows, shaking the doors as if human hands strove to gain admittance.

Long after the small household was fast asleep, she sat there motionless, and Thought was a shuttle weaving to and fro, weaving the threads of the past greyly into the present.

She saw herself again as a little child like Marigold, as carelessly happy and as innocent; lived over all

the days of her youth again, the roseate beauty of girlhood ere sorrow like a grim vulture hovered blackly over it.

She shuddered away from those years of life that had set a searing hand upon her heart, that had, once at least, almost turned her brain.

"But it is all past," she cried, groping passionately for happiness. "It is all past and over. I will not think of it again. If . . . I were only free—morally free. . . ."

But she did not finish the sentence.

When at last she rose, the clock had chimed two; but it was long before sleep claimed her, as she lay there tossing restlessly.

"Oh, Hugh, Hugh," she said aloud in the darkness once, "if things had only been different. If *he* had been like you, honest, true-hearted. . . ." She broke into a storm of sobs.

"Thank God," she said at last, "thank God, Hugh will never know."

CHAPTER XI

GROWING UP

. at the crossways
Of Childhood, the School stands.
(What holdeth the days?).

“**A**ND therefore Colbourne will be the central city of the new diocese.” St. Hubert was leaning against the iron gate, pausing for a moment in passing, as had been his wont for years ; for the Mistress of Gray House was generally to be found in the garden.

She was bending now over one of the flower-beds that were a riot of gold, her hair, a deep coppery gold in the brilliant sunlight, knotted simply at the back of her slender neck.

Over in a distant part of the garden, old Thomas, very bent and whitehaired now, was cutting and trimming the lawn, while near by, a quaint old fountain was sending, with a pleasant murmuring, a feathery water-spray into the air.

"There are to be new churches, new convents, and a new monastery. Of course, you have heard about that—and that the new Bishop of the Diocese comes to-morrow."

She smiled, a faint, inscrutable smile, as she straightened herself, coming forward with her hands full of golden blooms that would shortly fill the house with their fragrance.

"I believe Hannah did say something a few weeks ago," she confessed. "Father Flarney read it out from the altar, I think she told me."

"Yes, on his last visit to Gray Cliff." Perhaps St. Hubert wondered why, being a Roman Catholic, she did not attend Mass on the few occasions when the priest came to Gray Cliff; but her views on religion had not yet come under discussion between them.

He knew that she often went to that almost deserted chapel, during week-days, and sometimes at the hour of dusk; and once or twice he had seen her wandering in and out among the graves of the old churchyard attached.

The little old chapel was never locked; only the sacristy was, where were kept, in a dusty cupboard, the garb of the acolytes and of the priest, together with the brass monstrance.

"He is supposed to be very clever and most austere," he went on. "He is one of the bishops ordained by the Pope to open up dioceses in the North, and to report and stem the tide of heresy that is sweeping through the length and breadth of Australia."

"By heresy, of course, is meant broad-mindedness and liberty of thought." He glanced quickly at her, struck by something in her voice. "He is a Jesuit, of course."

"Oh, naturally," he answered. "They say he is to make some striking changes."

"What is his name?" she asked idly, breaking off a long, feathery spray of verbena bloom.

She looked very young and girlish as she stood there, sunlight on her face, sunlight lingering in the sweet brown darkness of her eyes; and he felt his heart beating fast, as a wave of the deep, silent love he would ever bear her, swept over him.

"I don't believe I've heard his name," he said. "To every one he will just be the Bishop of Colbourne, I suppose. I do not even know if he is an Australian, or an Irishman; though there was a rumour that he was a priest from one of the southern states."

She did not seem to be very interested, moving

here and there among the scarlet sumac shrubs that blazed by the gateway, and flung vivid splashes of colouring against the broken, grey sea-wall.

It was the month of daffodils again. On a day just like this, years ago now, he had last told her of his love.

Perhaps, as she bent over the flowers, the thought may have come to her also. It may have been the reflection of the scarlet sumac bushes that made her cheeks crimson and glow ; or it may——.

The years that had whitened St. Hubert's hair at the temples, and deepened the little lines on his broad brow and around his firm mouth, had seemingly passed the woman by.

Save for a few grey threads in her coppery hair, there was apparently no change. Her eyes still held their high serenity of purpose, and if suffering came to her, as often in his heart he had a premonition, it left no traces upon her fair face.

Yet there was a shadowy, tragic something clinging to her, elusive and subtle as a perfume that passes, yet returns.

Life still went on its old way in Gray Cliff, the same and yet not the same. One of the years had taken his mother with it into the shadowy aisles of Yesterday ; and the Homestead became desolate, indeed.

He never quite lost the hope that some day June would come to him, that somehow, and not far distant in the future, she would free herself from the fetters of that marriage of which he knew so little. Once he had spoken of divorce, and her face had gone so white, had shown such suffering as he could not understand, that never again had he spoken of it, only saying—

“Whenever the day comes—the day when you are free—you will know that you will find me still waiting.”

He did not know that, looking after him as he went from her sight, she had wrung her hands, and whispered with white lips—

“I shall never be free, I shall never, *never be free.*”

She felt the strength of his presence there, near at hand, in his lonely home ; she knew, perchance, that at night he looked towards the star of light in the tower of Gray House, and thinking of her, prayed for her happiness ; she knew also that the days in which he did not see her, if only for a few moments in passing, were as lost days in the calendar of his life.

I do not know if she loved him, perhaps she did not know herself ; for that earlier love, which had

cost her so much, dragged her soul into the mire, and so shadowed her life, seemed so fateful, so irrevocable, that she shut her heart to the insistent knocking of new love—the new love that would be tenderer, stronger, deeper, desiring only her good. Whenever she did think of Hugh, it was with a blinding rush of tenderness whose depths she did not attempt to fathom.

Of Marigold's father she strove not to think, and in the main she succeeded.

"That way madness lies," she had often quoted to herself.

But there were hours when the black shadow on her life hovered again over her. These were the hours, indeed, in which she visited that lonely chapel by the sea, not praying, not thinking, only watching blurred and confused memories drifting past her, and dully stabbing her heart with the old pain.

Once, wandering in that old churchyard where the yellow daffodils grew against the grey wall, she had looked down at a broken, time-stained tombstone, half buried in grass and weeds, and toppled to one side. On the mottled surface of the stone one word only could be deciphered—the word "Rest."

Rest!

She had spoken of that old tombstone to St. Hubert, and had said, half-laughingly, half-seriously :

"If I die in Gray Cliff, Hugh, I would like to be buried in that old churchyard."

When she had seen the swift look of pain on his rugged, strongly-modelled face, she turned lightly to other topics.

Any silences that grew between them now were but the pregnant silences of understanding, and no longer was St. Hubert's quiet mood a depressing thing, like a tangible weight.

The sheer cliffs towered behind the house, pearl-grey in the sunlight, faint purple in the shadows, with here and there a green shrub clinging precariously to its frail foothold, and here and there also, in cavern-like hollows, was a sombre blackness as of burned-out fires ; while behind the delicate splintered crags swayed languidly the blue shimmer of the ocean.

A brooding peace seemed upon the world, to envelop mind and body in its embrace.

For the first time, perhaps, Hugh saw why one could step out of the turmoil of life and seek the lethargic quiet of ways like this.

There must be something nun-like in her nature, he decided, to which this rest and quiet appealed.

Yet he was dimly aware that life sometimes challenged the youth of her, called her out to other roads, where laughter and light and ambition went side by side.

"The air is just like pot pourri this morning," she said, lifting her face to the winds from the sea. "Can you smell the pollen from the lilies? And the wistaria that is just breaking into purple bloom? Sometimes the wind from the pines, after rain especially, sends the blood lilting through the veins like wine."

"I used to think those black pines on the hill, with the gaunt, stricken gums behind them, absolutely typical of desolation," he answered.

"I love this grey-green world of ours," she said softly. "There is a restfulness about it, if also a sadness; but there is also inspiration, a challenging something that makes Australians different from other people. The Bush here is a wonderful living thing. The wide plains and the great undulating valleys speak incessantly of the wider roads of life and seem to brush away the petty fetters of what we deem society. They start a man out, untrammelled by caste or privilege, to fight his way up to the real heights. That is why, once the Australian Bush calls a man, it keeps him prisoner ;

strips from him once and for all the little subterfuges, hypocrisies. One steps out, and, as it were, sees the road of life as it really is, in true perspective, oneself as an ant instead of the god one believed oneself to be. The Bush," she added, "brings humility; yet it also brings the knowledge that life means action, and that there is some unseen goal ahead worth striving for."

"That was what John Oswald felt," he said slowly. "John, my friend, was honourable in more than title."

She did not speak of Lucy Oswald, as he had half expected she would.

Gossip in Colbourne, and in a lesser sense in Gray Cliff, had for many years coupled the name of St. Hubert with that of the pretty, frivolous mistress of the Manor. Some had gone so far as to hint that, at no distant date, one might expect to see Lucy Oswald change her name to St. Hubert; but if Hugh had any idea of the current gossip he took no notice of it, and if June Gray heard it she had never spoken of it.

Perhaps this reticence may have been due to the fact that Mrs. Oswald, in the brief visits she paid to Gray Cliff, called very frequently at the Gray House,

Robbed of her one-time considerable avoirdupois by some marvellous feat of corsetting, and possessed apparently of the secret of perennial youth, she always affected, in the presence of St. Hubert, a girlishness that, June Gray was sure, alarmed him while it secretly amused her.

He had a habit of betaking himself off almost abruptly, with some excuse about farm work that would not wait, as soon as Mrs. Oswald made her appearance ; and when his long legs had disappeared out of the gate, Mrs. Oswald, peering after him through the windows, would openly lament the fact that he worked too hard, and made himself a slave to the Homestead.

She had also, with a little air of possession, poured many confidences into the ears of her hostess, as they sat over the tea-table, St. Hubert being, it appeared, all that was desirable as a *parti*, even for the grand-daughter of an impecunious earl.

"If only Providence would be so kind as to remove an uncle and two nephews from the line of succession on the Oswald side, things might be different," she had often lamented. "Not only Gerald, but I, myself, would have a most brilliant future in England."

One got the impression, therefore, that the Hon-

ourable Mrs. Oswald believed herself to be, as Madame of the Beauty-parlours assured her, quite a young and lovely personage. Madame always packed this graceful assertion in with her latest aids to Beauty, flattery being the only thing which that astute individual gave for nothing.

June said nothing, apparently interested; and yet, as she looked at Lucy Oswald's fair prettiness, a sharp pang may have gone through her own heart.

Just as St. Hubert was turning away on this particular morning, Mrs. Oswald motored up, wearing a delicate, lace-frilled muslin gown, and a little bonnet-shaped hat in the shadow of which her face looked alluringly pretty and young.

They had all gone into the Gray House together, Mrs. Oswald volubly exclaiming at the beauty of the garden, while St. Hubert moved courteously by her side, saying little.

"I left Marigold and Rosa at the post office," said Lucy. "They wanted to walk around by the cliffs. How tall your daughter is growing, Mrs. Gray."

"Is Gerald with them?" asked St. Hubert, idly.

She smiled up at him as he carried over to her a cup of tea that June Gray was dispensing at

the dainty tea-table in the embrasure of the window.

"Gerald is such a favourite of yours, Hugh, isn't he?" She had always called him Hugh, from the very first days of his friendship with her husband. "And he thinks there is no one in the world like you."

She smiled again, this time a little consciously, and June Gray, looking over at them, saw that he coloured furiously, as if with embarrassment.

"What a boy he is!" she said to herself, her lips curving in a little amused smile as she caught his eye; and then, aloud, she said—

"Yes, Marigold is nearly as tall as I. How the children do grow!"

She sighed a little.

The gate opened then, and there was the sound of laughing voices on the path.

From the window they could see the wide, sea-shelled way plainly, Rosa coming first, through the gateway, with Marigold's dog scampering ahead; and then behind her, a little more slowly, Gerald and Marigold.

Just inside the gate, they paused, Gerald bending over the girl's hand. Something in his attitude touched June Gray's heart with sudden emotion that was half fear. Through the open window

she called, in a voice that to her own ears seemed strange—"Afternoon tea, children."

"All right, Dearest," and Marigold waved her free hand. "I've got a splinter in my hand, and Gerald is acting as the doctor."

They came in, a moment later, laughing happily, Rosa full of a letter she had received from one of her college friends.

"Her father is very wealthy, and they are related to the Earl of Manby," she explained with a touch of her mother, that brought a smile to St. Hubert's lips.

"Mother, haven't *we* got an Earl somewhere in our family?" laughed Marigold.

She stood by the tea-table, the delicately fluted cup in her hand, her eyes very clear and blue.

When one looked at Marigold, one saw how the years had passed. The little child who had played in the gardens, or toddled after old Thomas along the sea-shelled path, was gone; and in her place was a girl of seventeen, tall and slender, like and yet unlike her mother.

The shape of the eyes was there, but the colouring was different; the finely-shaped nose, the short upper lip were the same; but the chin and the lower lip were formed, it seemed, in a weaker mould.

Involuntarily St. Hubert thought of the curtained picture in the studio upstairs, as he looked at the girl, standing there, with the harmonious background of deep green velvet curtains, a fitting setting for her girlish beauty.

"That is it," he said to himself. "She has her mother's beauty without its strength. She must be very like her father at times."

Only the white world of the Gray House had Marigold known. He found himself irrelevantly wondering what effect the outside world would have upon her nature, a nature that he suspected might be easily affected by the influences of environment.

The life at Gray House had kept her a child in heart and soul, plastic material that had not yet been poured into a definite mould.

Mrs. Oswald had come this afternoon with a proposition.

"The dear Bishop and I have been talking over parochial matters," she explained with pride. "Rosa is to go to the new convent that is shortly to be opened. They bought a big property for a mere song, you know, and a teaching order of nuns will be immediately installed. Rosa will have just one year there,"

"Just to please the dear bishop?" asked St. Hubert lazily.

She laughed.

"Don't be a tease, Hugh. Every one raves over the Bishop. He's such a gentleman. You know, they're not *all* gentlemen," she added as an afterthought.

"No," agreed St. Hubert, "they're not. I have vivid memories of some priests and bishops who could do with a little manual on how to behave—at the dinner-table, for instance. Manners really ought to be included in the monastic curriculum."

Over at the table, half-listening to Rosa, half-heeding the conversation by the divan, where Mrs. Oswald was seated (her back to the window, lest the light should show up any faults in her complexion), June Gray involuntarily smiled.

"So when Rosa goes, Mrs. Gray," said Mrs. Oswald, turning towards her hostess, "I would like you to send Marigold, too. It would be the making of her."

"Send Marigold?"

The mother turned and looked at the girl, bending now with Rosa and Gerald over some water-colours.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of it! She has always been educated at home, as you know and she is far

from backward. Her French and Latin are very good, so Mr. St. Hubert thinks."

"Oh, but it's the influence of the nuns, and the mixing with other children," persisted Mrs. Oswald. "Don't you think a child gets too much into one groove, and one line of thought, when she has not mixed with other children?"

June Gray's eyes were a little shadowed and perplexed.

"You see"—the Honourable Mrs. Oswald, as if remembering a promise to the Bishop, plunged into the fray—"it is not as if Marigold were only a child. She is almost a woman."

A sudden quiver of pain touched the quiet lips of the mother.

"You won't be always living at Gray House," pursued Mrs. Oswald. "Or, if you do, one can't expect children to have exactly the ideas of the mother. Sooner or later rebellion comes, especially to girls of the age of Marigold and Rosa. Don't you think that is so?"

"Yes . . . very true," June murmured mechanically.

She put up one hand, smoothing away the hair from her brow, and as if with the gesture she would also smooth away the wrinkles of thought.

She was obviously relieved when St. Hubert, who was watching her keenly, arose and declared, as Mrs. Oswald poutingly protested, that he had an appointment with a neighbouring farmer about some sheep.

"And sheep are very useful assets," he said, and his smile at his hostess, over the head of Mrs. Oswald, was full of meaning.

With his departure, the children went out into the garden, their laughter ringing merrily.

For over an hour Mrs. Oswald chatted on, now about St. Hubert, now about her Sydney friends and admirers.

At last she rose, shaking out her dainty frock, and gathering up her scarlet parasol, and all her paraphernalia of silver vanity bags, and puff-boxes, and jingling chains.

"You will think it over—about the convent?" were her last words at parting.

"Yes, I will think it over," June Gray answered rather mechanically.

There were little tired lines about her eyes, and as Lucy Oswald, settling herself in her smart motor, looked back at her hostess, she said to herself, with a little half-malicious touch of gratification—

"She is beginning to go off in her looks. Not

that I ever thought she had any ; although, as I told the Bishop, some people would rave over that style of face."

Whereupon she took out the little mirror she always carried, and making an excuse of fixing her veil, surveyed her own fresh, unlined beauty, with perhaps an evanescent wish that Madame would lower her charges a little.

"I will send the motor for Rosa later," she had said. "They simply love staying to dinner here, but I must take Gerald with me, as the Bishop will be at the Manor at five."

A moment later the motor was carefully picking its way along the lower road, and then speeding on into the blue distance, that shimmered faintly with heat-waves curling spirally up from the earth, where the grass was turning grey as Summer advanced.

For a long while June Gray stood by the gate, leaning against its wrought-iron top-bar, a little heavily, as if tired.

On the lawn near at hand, like butterflies tired of play, the children had settled.

She could hear Rosa's voice, very like that of her mother's in tone, and she listened, half-dreamily.

"You foolish Baby !" And later, "So my dress

will be of ivory satin, and lace, *such* lace. I think it will be the gift of my *grand'mère*, the Countess ; but I am not sure. It may be one of the family heirlooms on my father's side, and then I shall wear the Tralholme diamonds, and the great priceless pearl that is so very, very old, that I cannot remember. But it has a strange history."

"And you will go away, to England, to all the countries?" Marigold's voice had a wistful intonation.

"Oh ! I shall go on a continental tour first. And perhaps he'll be a prince, not a *fairy* prince, Baby"—scornfully—"but a real live prince, from one of those foreign places. And then I shall wear a tiara, and live in a great palace, but I shan't stay there always."

"Would you have to stay there—something like a prisoner?" Marigold was staring dreamily over the whispering daffodils. They seemed no longer her playmates, golden-clad fairies dancing to the piping of the winds, whispering of peace and content in this old-world garden.

To-day, a new note trembled among them, threaded itself into the wind-music, and broke ; and she seemed to see her first vision of a Prince Charming, no longer a fairy, but alive, like Gerald perhaps, tall, grey-eyed, fair of face.

Her fairy-prince would still come on a white horse, galloping boldly over the land, across the yellow daffodils that, swaying low, would be as a carpet for his feet; whereas Rosa would see her fairy-prince, very much up-to-date, arriving in the smartest of smart motors, with two footmen, one on the seat with the chauffeur, and the other behind.

In Rosa's vision he would have one hand upon his heart, the other flourishing a cheque-book, and instead of the music of the daffodils, she would hear the melody of a string band, piping a measure for her satin-slippered feet in a ducal ball-room.

"I would never be a prisoner for any man," said Rosa, with a shrug of her shoulders, that privately she thought very fascinating, and most certainly French. "It is only when one marries an old man, that it might happen that way."

"But—you wouldn't marry an *old*, a very old man, Rosa?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders again.

"Why not?"

She laughed at the half-shocked, half-fascinated look in her companion's eyes.

"Why not, you Baby? Many girls as young as I have done so. What does it matter? It is the

position that really counts. I want jewels, and society, and loads of money."

Her hands went out in a lavish gesture.

"What are you talking about, children?" The mistress of Gray House, slowly rousing herself from her reverie, came softly over the grassy sward towards them.

"Only of the future," said Rosa, smiling, and she stood up, gracefully stretching her young, lithe body.

"The future?" June Gray smiled, too, a little faintly, and her arm went around her daughter in a sudden, passionate gesture, as if of protection.

"Rosa was talking about her marriage," explained Marigold in her clear, childish voice, a little excited. "Tell about the white satin gown with the court train, Rosa, and the pearls. . . ."

"Ssh! children! You're too young to think of such things." The mother's laugh was a little forced. "Why, you've a year each to spend at the convent yet, perhaps more than a year."

Her hand caressed her little daughter's golden head, in her eyes a strange eagerness.

She expected that Marigold would cry out passionately: "No, no! Dearest, I don't want to go

to the convent school. I don't want ever to leave you."

But Marigold did no such thing; she clasped and unclasped her hands quickly as she always did when excited, and her voice came breathlessly—

"Oh, Dearest! You *do* intend to let me go, then? I was so afraid you would not. Dearest, I am so glad, so glad!"

Every word fell heavily, one by one, on the heart of the woman; it was as if she were hearing the slow fall of clods upon a coffin.

It was then that the children saw Hugh at the gate, calling to them to take in the usual mail of books and magazines.

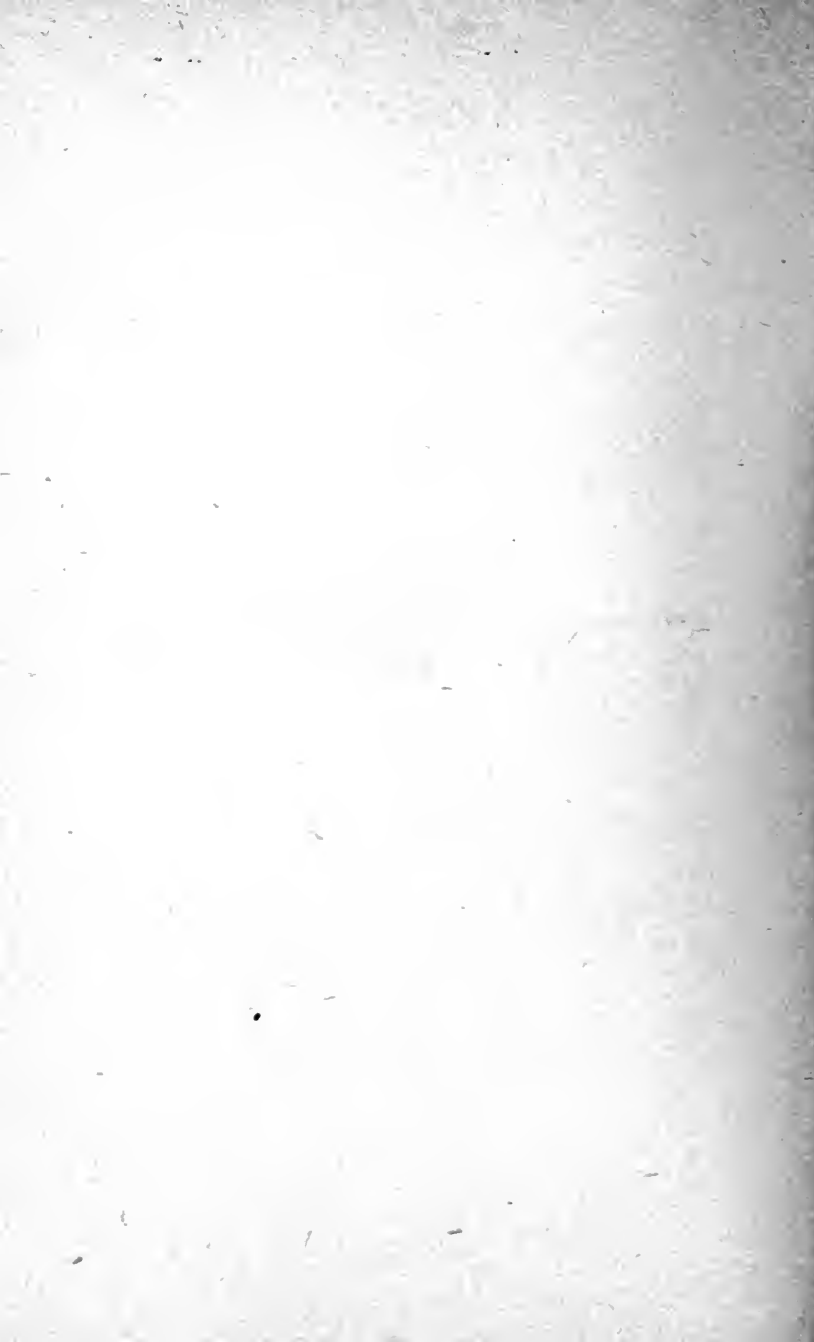
Hand in hand, Rosa and Marigold raced down to the gateway.

June stood and looked after them, saw Hugh at the gate, heard his courteous greeting, and turning slowly, went into the house alone, walking as one very tired.



Part II

*Flowers bud, and bloom, and blow ;
Childhood passes ere we know.*



CHAPTER XII

THE NEW BISHOP OF COLBOURNE

"I am the one True Church; I hold for ye,
Body and soul, for all eternity—
The keys of Heaven as the keys of Earth;
I claim allegiance from the hour of birth,
And when ye die, I, too, unlock the Gate
Of the Beyond. . . ."

"THE first thing to be done," announced the Bishop of Colbourne, leaning back comfortably in his revolving desk-chair, "the first thing to be done is to have a bazaar."

"Yes, m'lord"—deferentially.

"And the next," pointing one white, carefully-manicured finger impressively at the parish priest of Colbourne, "is to build a convent here. What schools do the children attend?"

"The State school, m'lord."

"The *State*!"—with an indescribable tone of contempt—"a Protestant-governed institution for the ruin of young souls, nothing more or less, with not

a scrap of the spiritual guidance of the One True Church. A wealthy district like this and yet not even one Catholic school ! ”

“ But the inhabitants are mostly Protestant, m’lord,” apologized the priest, feeling, indeed, as if his twenty years’ indifferent toil had been vain. “ Shure, there are very few Roman Catholics in this district.”

The new Bishop of Colbourne put on his pince-nez and glared.

“ Well, isn’t it the *Protestants* who build the convents and schools, or rather their money does ? How should we be off for institutions if they didn’t, I ask ye ? ”

“ Faith. I’ve been thinking those very thoughts’ m’lord. . . . ”

“ I hope,” interrupted his lordship drily, “ that you wouldn’t be saying them aloud, would ye ? Give me the list of names—no, the Protestant list.”

He ran his eye over it, rapidly nodding his head in approval.

“ Business people, most of them, Flarney ? Ah, well, there’ll be no difficulty in getting the convent or school here.”

“ ’Twill cost a tidy bit,” suggested Father Flarney, still dubiously. “ It will, indeed.”

The Bishop bent forward in his chair, a rather good-looking and impressive man, fairly young, after the style of the newly ordained bishops who were flooding the country as a consequence of the tide of immigration. If there was any fault at all to be found with his appearance, a close observer would have said that it lay in the habit of looking anywhere but straight at the person speaking or spoken to.

He studied the district map in silence.

"Where is this place, Gray Cliff?"

"Shure, 'tis a bit of a place, m'lord, an' very few people living there at all. About twinty of the faith, indade, an' 'there's not any more. 'Tis about seven miles from here."

His Lordship was about to dismiss it when he asked—

"And the Catholics there? Poor, I suppose?"

"Not all, m'lord. There's Mr. St. Hubert, the squatter, and the Hon. Lucy Oswald, and Mrs. Gray."

The Bishop looked up with an air of interest.

"Seven miles only, Flarney. Well, there should surely be some good money there. You don't seem to have troubled very much about financial affairs, Flarney."

And indeed the Reverend Patrick Flarney had not. He hailed, as do most young priests sent to Australia, from a cabin in Ireland, beside which his present four-roomed presbytery, simple as it was, seemed a very palace.

There was as much fishing and shooting around Colbourne as the sporting soul of any priest could desire ; and in his heart of hearts he was heretic enough to admit that Protestants had as much right to enter Heaven as Roman Catholics, although the Rev. Patrick Flarney did not let himself trouble very much about it at all.

He did his "duties" ; recited his office at the appointed times ; celebrated mass ; heard confessions ; what more could the Bishop want ?

He said mass on every second Sunday in Colbourne ; on the third at Gray Cliff ; and on the fourth, in the midst of a wild, broken stretch of country, at a village miles to the north that consisted mainly of a hotel, a blacksmith's shop, and a store. For the rest of the week he mixed amiably and happily with the Protestants of his district. His knowledge of the English Grammar had limits, and, like the majority of priests, he knew little more Latin than the services of the Church required in the celebration of the mass.

His simple soul was sorely distressed as the Bishop frowningly pointed out opportunity after opportunity missed of converting his Protestant friends to the Faith ; and in his harassed heart he said a miserable good-bye to the old, simple, peaceful régime of life at Colbourne.

He was also saying good-bye to Colbourne had he only known it ; for the Bishop, with an eye to the future, wanted a few Jesuitically-trained, up-to-date men, suave but implacable, to work a large and wealthy district like Colbourne ; he had already mentally relegated Flarney to an obscure district further north—until the tide of progress should reach there ; when, if Flarney was still living, he would be shifted again, perhaps to some district where a priest had been disliked by his parishioners. Priests like Flarney, if they were not financial successes like the Jesuit-trained men, were a power as an example—or as a comparison.

The Bishop knew well that the Protestants of a neighbourhood where men like Flarney existed would always pooh-pooh any suggestion by alarmists, pointing to Flarney as their conception of a priest, and judging all other priests by him.

Patrick Flarney had paved the road for the success of the Church by his simple ways, had staked

the pegs, as it were, for the ecclesiastical gold-rush.

"Toleration!" the priests would clamour, eyes turned heavenwards, and hands deep in Protestant pockets.

"Toleration! Toleration!" the Protestants would retort petulantly to those of their own denomination whom they were apt to think of as extremists. "Tut-tut, man! Look at Father Flarney, now."

"And who is this Mrs. Gray, of Gray House?" asked his lordship. "I see you have marked her as wealthy."

"Faith, she's a widow, m'lord. They do say she is very wealthy, but she never goes to mass at all."

The Bishop frowned.

"Why don't you look up that collection of 'Sermons for Heretics,' and if she does not go to church to hear it, go and read it to her?"

"Faith, she will never see any visitors, she will not," asserted Father Flarney. "'Tis a way I have of believing that she doesn't like priests."

"Why?"

"Shure, your lordship, and how would I be knowing? 'Tis but the idea I have that she doesn't like them at the house."

The frown deepened.

“ And has she no children ? ”

“ Only wan, m’lord ! A little slip of a thing, runnin’ wild about the coast. ’Tis the nice child, she is, however, she is so.”

His rugged face lit up with the love for children that he had never been able to repress.

“ And does *she* come to mass ? ”

“ Well, she does an’ she does not. ’Tis like this. The old servant there brings her, but the mother will not be having her going to confession. ’Tis strange ideas.”

“ Very heretical ideas, that must and shall cease,” thundered the Bishop authoritatively, giving an almost imperceptible glance of contempt at poor Flarney, “ and the child will have to attend the convent school when it is built. How can a child be expected to handle wealth, to which she is heiress, without being spiritually guided by the Church ? ”

The Rev. Patrick Flarney seemed about to speak, but discreetly changed his mind.

“ Sure,” as he told himself afterwards, “ ’tis not for me to be saying things to my Superior. Holy Mary ! ’tis not for me to be thinkin’ such thoughts, ’tis not, indeed.”

“ And the St. Hubert’s. They’re all right, I see. The Oswalds—what do they give ? ”

" 'Tis only the servants, and at midwinter and summer holidays the children, that come. Mrs. Oswald is always away. 'Tis herself that likes life and amusement."

" When is she returning ? "

" Very soon, m'lord, from what the children told me. I don't think there's much left when her ladyship is done entertaining and travelling, I do not."

" It's always the same," said the Bishop irritably. " Let a Roman Catholic get rich, and ye'll get little from him, save reams of stupid talk about enlightenment."

When Father Flarney took his hat from the hall-stand, he gave a surreptitious glance at his fishing-rods in the corner ; it was a promising day, and a few of his cronies would be already off to the river. It was a loving glance he gave the rods and tackle, and then another thoughtful, almost calculating one at the closed door of the room that his Lordship the Bishop had converted into a study.

He might be called in there again at any moment. The old free days were over.

" O God be with the days ! " said Father Flarney miserably.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEETING

"The mind of a child is a pliable thing;
The future lies in the hands that mould
It to their pattern, whate'er it be,
Shaped or ill-shapen, thought-fettered or free."

EARLY in January the name of Marigold Gray was inscribed, in the Reverend Mother's angular writing, upon the list of pupils at the Colbourne Convent; and in the prim, bare-looking sitting-room, with its aspect of religious poverty and humility, the Mistress of Gray House gave over her daughter, with a wordless prayer trembling upon her lips.

The Reverend Mother had seemed kind, very plausible, and evidently anxious to please, with just the faintest suggestion of the superiority she felt as one of God's Elect.

Privately she dubbed Marigold's mother cold and proud, unknowing how much heartbreak went to that calm exterior.

She told Mrs. Gray that Marigold's teacher was very kind, but, of course, desirably firm ; and that if Marigold were the least bit homesick, they would let her know.

Sister Mary Clementa, the teacher in question, was engaged interviewing another mother, it appeared, so June saw all the nuns with the exception of Sister Clementa.

She took away with her, allied to the sense of misery at parting from her child, if only for a week, an atmosphere of apparent kindness and peace ; and, fortified with that thought, she went back to the Gray House, which, for the first time since she came to Gray Cliff, seemed strangely lonely and desolate.

" But she will be home once a week," she consoled herself ; " and it will be only for a year. Afterwards we can travel. The schooling will definitely thrust aside any foolishly sentimental ideas that Rosa has put into her head."

Perhaps with a premonition of some far-off impending calamity, the woman sobbed herself to sleep, turning her face to the wall lest she should see Marigold's empty bed, with its silken cover quite smooth, and its dainty lace pillow-shams uncrumpled.

She went for long walks in the days that followed,

as if impatiently walking off an alien restlessness and discontent.

On the first night of the child's coming to the convent, the Bishop and the Reverend Mother were discussing the various pupils.

He went down the list, pausing at each.

"Marigold Gray."

"Yes. We are calling her Mary." The Reverend Mother frowned. "Marigold is such a foolish name, and, shure, it means nothing at all. It does not, indeed."

"This is the rich widow's daughter?"

"Yes! she didn't tell me anything, however, about her means. I tried to find out, but she said very little, seemed very proud and reserved."

"Humph! And the child herself?"

"She appears to have been brought up in a most foolish and impracticable way altogether. She actually calls her mother 'Dearest' instead of mother. I informed her that she must always speak of her here, and indeed anywhere, as 'mother,' and that she must put all babyish thoughts aside, as she is no longer a little child."

"She cried, I suppose?"

"Yes. Most of them do, at first. A year here will be the making of her."

"She may stay more than a year," said the Bishop slowly, and the Reverend Mother looked up quickly at his tone ; then she answered, as slowly—

"Very well."

"Rosa Oswald ! I see they come in together. I think that Mrs. Oswald will not leave much to either her children or the Church if she is as extravagant as they say." He frowned a little. "I found her rather mean over a question of a bit of land in the Main Street, here, that I wanted for a convent laundry."

There was a sound downstairs as of children singing an evening hymn in the little chapel, then a rumbling as of feet moving and marching.

The Bishop went to the door looking down the corridor, and the Reverend Mother, short and stout, followed him.

"Would you like to see any of the pupils, Your Lordship ? "

"No . . . Yes, you can send the girl Gray down to the sitting-room, if you like."

It was there in that room, which seemed to give forth a strange chill of its own, that Marigold first saw the Bishop.

She came slowly into the room, behind her a smiling and discreetly fluttered Sister.

"You can go, Sister." The Bishop dismissed her with a nod. "Come here, Mary Gray."

"My name is Marigold," she said in a low, clear voice. Something of her childishness came back to her as she stood uncertainly before him. Her eyes were dark as if with unshed tears, the lashes still wet.

He stared down at her, frowning a little. Her face seemed strangely familiar to him. He could not think of whom she reminded him, only that some strange fascination or attraction seemed to envelop her, and drew him towards her.

"Mary is the name of a saint," he told her coldly, "and Marigold means nothing at all, as the Reverend Mother will have told you, my child. You must obey the Reverend Mother and the nuns in everything, *everything*, mind ye, child. 'Tis they who know what is good for your soul. When you are obeying them, you are also obeying God. When you disobey them, you disobey God, and you bring sorrow to the heart of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God. You know, too, that when you offend or disobey God, that you crucify again God the Son. That is in your catechism, isn't it?"

"Yes," she whispered.

He patted her on the head.

"And you must never repeat what the nuns say to ye, knowing it is for your good. Any question ye are asked at any time is for the good of your soul. If the good Sisters, or the Reverend Mother, who is doing the duty of the Blessed Virgin to ye, ask ye to promise them anything, and ye give your promise, ye must never break it. Ye give the promise to God, who will be listening. Ye will remember that?"

"Yes," she whispered; and then, "I would like to go home to 'Dearest'."

"Tut, tut, now! Ye mustn't be a little baby"; for the tears were gathering in her eyes, even now, welling slowly and splashing over the dark conventual dress she wore. "Won't ye be seeing your mother on the Saturday? Crying at seventeen years, too! Tut, tut!"

"I—want her now." This time he could barely hear her whisper.

"Now, now!" He was obviously impatient. "Turn up your face and let me look at ye, child."

Obediently she lifted her face, and something in it seemed to strike again a sudden chord of elusive memory. He gazed at her with a puzzled frown.

Gray! Gray! The name was not familiar.

"What was your father's name?" he asked suddenly.

"I have no father," she said; and then "I have never seen my father."

"But ye will be knowing what his name was? Was it Tom, or Michael, or Patrick?"

"I do not know," she whispered. She was twisting and untwisting her handkerchief in her hands, and the Reverend Mother, who had come quietly in in obedience to a nod from his Lordship, took the little square of muslin and lace from her and laid it on the table.

The girl's lips quivered.

"She doesn't know whether her father's name is Thomas or Melchizedek," said the Bishop, turning to the Reverend Mother. Half-smiling at his own humour, he put his hand on the child's shoulder.

"And do ye know nothing, at all"—banteringly—"about your father?"

As a child, repeating a lesson, something that had been said long ago, she answered slowly, as on the night when St. Hubert and she had played at fairy stories in the spacious room that looked over the sea—

"My father was a good man . . . and . . . he died."

There was a sudden silence in the room.

When the Bishop spoke again he looked first at the Reverend Mother, and then back at the innocent child-face.

The words seemed to linger in the room.

"My father was a good man—and he died."

"Where does your mother," said the Reverend Mother, with a strange, new gentleness, "where does your mother have masses said for the Dead? In Gray Cliff?"

But the child did not seem to understand.

"'Tis not in Gray Cliff," asserted His Lordship, "for the name is not on Father Flarney's list at all."

"May be," he said after a thoughtful pause, "she is a heretic. I must ask Flarney."

He put his hand on the child's head, and over her golden curls, brushed now stiffly back, he looked at the Reverend Mother.

"See that this child," he ordered briefly, "does not become a heretic."

"I will, your Lordship," said the Reverend Mother obediently. "It shall be as you wish."

CHAPTER XIV

A SHADOW FALLS

When the first shadow falls,
It falleth light.

"FATE seems to ordain," said the Honourable Mrs. Oswald with her little frivolous laugh, "that you and the dear Bishop should never meet. The last time that you paid me one of your rare visits, you had just driven away, when up came his Lordship's motor. The dust from your pony-cart had hardly settled on the road . . . really."

They were standing now on the wide verandah of the Manor. Afternoon tea was over, and Mrs. Gray had said she must hurry back as she had some business letters to write.

"The Bishop called on me twice," she answered shading her eyes from the sun that blazed hotly down on the garden and the red-tiled roofs of the Manor. "On one occasion I was out, and on the other I had such a bad nervous headache that it was impossible

for me to go down. However"—with a little irony—"I sent him a cheque."

"The dear Bishop *is* rather keen on the financial side," admitted Mrs. Oswald with a laugh. "He thinks you are a heretic, I'm afraid. The cheque would, however, relieve his mind a little."

June Gray said nothing, only smiled a little wistfully as her gaze went apparently to the low line of hills to the southward.

"You must meet him soon, however. There is a Garden Party at the convent very shortly. You will be there, of course."

"Oh, yes! I promised Marigold last week that I would go." A shadow flickered over her face, a little pale now.

"You're not looking very well," asserted Mrs. Oswald. "You really want a holiday."

"Yes, I'm not feeling my usual self." She moved abruptly, as if uninclined to pursue the topic. "It is only the heat. This has been a very trying summer indeed. However, at the end of the year I am contemplating a trip to England."

"And you will leave the Gray House shut up?" asked her hostess, interestedly. Mrs. Gray had only a few weeks ago bought the place and the land attached, to the delight of its former owner, so

Mrs. Oswald would have no regret on that score.

"Thomas and Hannah will be there."

"And Marigold will stay at the Convent, of course." Mrs. Oswald never burdened herself with any of her children when she went for a trip; and often, in secret, she deplored the fact that Rosa was passing her girlhood, and would soon demand a season in Town.

"No," almost sharply; and then in a lower voice, and rather hesitatingly. "I feel—I suppose it's silly of me to have such an idea—but, somehow, I feel that—that the Convent is coming between me and my child."

"Why!" Mrs. Oswald was frankly interested. She wondered maliciously what the Bishop would think of such an heretical idea.

"Marigold seems changing in some inexplicable way. There are so many little ways in which I find she has altered."

"Oh, they all do. That is only natural, Mrs. Gray. Marigold is passing into womanhood, and she must naturally change."

"But . . . her reserve—even with me. She no longer comes to me or tells me things as she used to do."

"People say *you* are reserved, you know."

Mrs. Gray laughed, a little unhappily, and changed the subject abruptly.

On the way home, leaning back in her seat, as old Thomas drove homeward, her thoughts went back to the past.

"Reserved"—she said to herself bitterly—"and once I used to be different, every thought of my heart uppermost, for all the world to see."

At dusk that night she went for a walk along the shore, standing listening to the screaming of the sea-gulls, wheeling over the cliffs for a last flight; and afterwards she went into that lonely little chapel, kneeling there in the dark.

It was there, in the churchyard, that Hugh St. Hubert found her.

He had been leaning against the low sea-wall, gazing contemplatively over the sea, and then at a sound of a creaking door had turned his head and saw her slight figure, white against the darkening dusk. He came over the intervening grass to meet her, and when he saw that her eyes were full of tears, he took her arm in his, and said gently—

"Come."

They had gone slowly together out of the little neglected churchyard, with its broken tombstones and grass-grown graves, where the green of bulbs

peeped through the brown loam against the old weather-stained walls.

There was no soul in sight.

Down in the valley, where the few lights flickered through the dusk, the only sounds were of children's laughter, the yapping of a dog across the stillness, or the whistling of a labourer going home across the common.

At the top of the hill she paused, and without a word, but with an inexpressibly weary gesture, sank down at one of the boulders, an action that brought him back a vivid memory of the day on which he had first seen her.

"What is it . . . June?" he said at last, in a low voice.

"Everything," she said. There were tears in her voice. "Hugh, I have come to the hour through which you long ago passed safely, that blackest, bitterest of all hours, when nothing seems worth while, not even life." Her voice broke. "Even life seems scarce worth the living."

"Is—it bad news?" He felt his heart beating. "Or—is it Marigold?"

"You, too, then, have noticed?" she cried. He lied bravely.

"No, no, June! It is only that, since it is the

first time the child has been away from you, you look for some change in her. Living day by day, and side by side with one, change still comes but so gradually and imperceptibly that it passes unnoticed. That is all, June."

She shook her head.

"If I could be sure, Hugh." Her voice was a little hoarse. "Marigold is all I have had during the long years I have struggled through since her birth. Everything has been for her, every thought, even. I have given up everything for her." She seemed now quite to forget his presence. "Everything—as—I gave up everything for her father."

There was bitterest suffering in her voice, a world of grief.

"June," he cried beseechingly, "June. . . ."

She did not seem to hear him.

"She is all I had, all I have. The Church seems to be coming cruelly between us to separate us, to divide us—as it did. . . ." She stopped suddenly then, putting her hand wearily to her brow.

"Help me home, Hugh," she whispered.

Silently he helped her to her feet, and leaning heavily on his arm, she went wearily up the steep road. Some one passed them in the half-light, but neither noticed.

At the gate she paused.

"Do not come in, Hugh, I am better alone."

"Don't think of these things," he pleaded.

"Dear, believe that you are not well, and that it is only imagination."

"I can't help thinking of them," she said helplessly, miserably. "Oh, Hugh, if my baby should turn from me, I should die."

"Why should she turn from you, June?" he said soothingly. "Do you not know that all the years of your unselfish love are everything to her? Do you not know that a few months of convent training will leave little or no impress on her life?"

"I don't know," she answered miserably. "Something seems to have risen between us. Her old childish candour and frankness seem to have gone. To-day she wrote me a letter, asking me to give her permission to stay, as the nuns desired, until the 'Garden Party,' for which they are practising some theatricals."

"Yes?"

"It was not a letter such as she would once have written. There was a false note through it; there was too much also of the assertion that she was so happy there, and so wrapped up in her work,

that she had no desire to come home for this Saturday to Monday as usual."

She was breathing heavily, as if trying to fight against a swift rush of tears that would sweep away her last vestige of self-control.

"I have noticed of late that she made a point of calling me 'Mother,' where always before she had called me 'Dearest.' It seems only a small thing, and maybe it is the right thing. And the other day, tidying up an old trunk in the attic, I came across some of her hoarded treasures. Only a year ago, Hugh, she had often gone in and taken them out. The other day she said calmly, 'How foolish one is to believe in fairy stories!' It was not her voice that spoke, it was as if she were a parrot, repeating a phrase the nuns had used."

"She can't always believe in fairy stories, June."

"No, I know. But, don't you see, Hugh, that the beautiful bloom of illusion is being rubbed off everything for her. I have let her believe that her own life was like that of a flower, that life itself was a beautiful thing, that love could be only a sacrament. As a flower unfolded, I told her, her own life would unfold. I put life before her in its highest, its best, aspect. . . ."

He was silent.

"Now all that is swept away. She sees only, with terrible clearness, that one thing is either right and good, or that it is wrong and evil; and she has become already a self-constituted judge of the good and bad of the world. Hugh"—her voice broke—"if I, her mother, were a bad woman, she would be a bitter judge."

There was something in her voice he could not understand, all shaken, and half-inarticulate as it was.

"There is no woman like you, June, in all the world," he said. "Marigold has a mother to be proud of, in whose life the most powerful search-light would find no flaw. I . . ."

She was leaning heavily against the gate, swaying so that she almost fell; but when he would have carried her indoors, she shrank back.

"No, no Hugh! It is only—my heart. I will be all right in a moment.

He kept his arm around her shoulder that she might not fall, protectingly as a brother might, although the blood raced in his veins.

After a while she spoke again.

"Her faith, and its conceptions, too, are different from what I taught. Possibly"—her hands were trembling now—"possibly I never thought she

would ever be in a convent, or in any school for the matter of that. Only, she wanted to go, and it seemed unfair to stand in her way. I had never denied anything for her good, and this, it seemed, was for her highest good ; I did not want her to be fettered by any narrow creed." She lifted one hand to her brow in a weary gesture that wrung the man's heart foolishly.

"I taught her the God above all the Churches ; taught her that all the Churches, each and all, were humbly striving, with their different conceptions, to do His Will. I spoke of Christ's great sacrifice that we might know the road to follow, and that the world should be saved. I wanted her to see only the good in everything and in everybody."

"And—now ? " he questioned slowly.

"Now, everything is different. She came home wearing scapulars, and a little *Agnus Dei* that the Reverend Mother had given her. The week before last she said to me suddenly that she could not understand why Protestants stayed outside the one True Church—the *one True Church*, Hugh, God help us ! "

He did not answer that little heart-broken cry that had left her lips unawares, but some long dormant and suppressed resentment against the Church, of

which he was a member, welled up in his own heart.

"She said that Hell was a very terrible place ; that she did not know before that such terrors existed ; and that the world was very evil, indeed." There was passion in the woman's voice now. "When I said, ' But, Marigold, there is much more good than evil everywhere,' she answered that Sister Mary Clementa had said that the Church was the only true earthly judge, and that God and the Church were inseparable. She also spoke of the power and glory of the Queen of Heaven."

"Are you going to take her away, then ? "

"I do not know what to do. Surely there will be nothing more of that kind to teach her. She already firmly believes that the nuns are right, and that I, apparently out of ignorance of the true things, am wrong. I am going away in a few months ; I will take her away then." Her hands were trembling. "Out in the world, mixing with people whom she will find are not the satyrs that she has been taught to think them, she will form her own conclusions. If my teachings have been too high and idealistic, and the teachings of the nuns have made her see life with all its evil traits uppermost, and the world she once thought beautiful as a monster ready to devour, she will, in the course of

time, come to the pathway that lies between the two, and surely gain the right point of view."

"It is only a question of a few months, then," he said. "Little woman, think of the future then! Yet, if you are going to be unhappy in the meantime take her away *at once*."

"She would reason out why I did it, or the nuns would reason for her," she said a little bitterly. "It is only for a few months, after all, Hugh."

As she turned away, and held out her hand, he bent and kissed it.

"God bless you, little woman," he whispered.

"You are very good to me, Hugh," Her voice was not quite steady.

"You will never find me anything else, June. I shall always hope and pray for your highest good and for your ultimate happiness, whether it be I"—his voice, too, was unsteady—"whether it be I or any other man who helps to make that happiness."

Then he strode away into the dusk, and the soft purple darkness closed around him.

CHAPTER XV

“ SO YOU—ARE MRS. GRAY ”

“ In the lightest hour doth a blow oft fall ;
The sombre shadow oft blots out all
The sunlight of e'en the most radiant day.”

“ ‘ **A**ND,’ as I says to myself at the time, never even noticing as there was such a thing in the world as anyone else on the path ’ ”—Miss Primrose was giggling sentimentally and with apparently surprising good-nature into one of the convent cups—“ ‘ And the two of them keeping it so quiet too,’ says I to myself. ‘ But, of course, Mrs. Oswald would be sure to know it, being so friendly-like there.’ ”

“ Of course,” said the Honourable Mrs. Oswald, her lips pressed into a firm line, and suppressing a wild desire to become hysterical, even in the midst of the gay, laughing, ever-moving groups that filled the convent grounds.

“ Of course,” she dug her silk parasol viciously

into the soft turf, bowing now and again to an acquaintance who passed ; and under her delicately-laid-on colouring her cheeks went furiously white. " But don't you think you must be a little mistaken, Miss Primrose ? The arm of an escort is quite—permissible in—er—in our set."

" 'Twas the way that they were talking to each other," submitted the postmistress humbly ; " hours and hours they must have been at that there gate."

Mrs. Oswald looked at her with sudden sharpness.

" Did you hear what they were saying ? "

" Oh, no, ma'am," protested Miss Primrose feebly. " I was way up the slope, sitting there because I was so tired with the walk. 'Twas a long time before Mr. St. Hubert passed me. I wished him the time o' evening, but he never seemed to hear me at all, just walked on, with his head down, as if thinking hard."

" Perhaps he was," remarked Mrs. Oswald bitterly. She rose as two of the nuns came over, and became all at once very charming and girlish in her manner.

" Has Mrs. Gray arrived yet ? " she asked Sister Mary Clementa a moment after Miss Primrose, catching sight of some of her friends, had mingled with the passing crowd.

" Not yet." Sister Mary Clementa's face was,

like that of most of the other nuns, stolidly impassive and devoid of expression, although a little flushed now with the unusual excitement. "I hope she will come. I have never seen her, you know, and little Mary Gray's face haunts me with a fleeting resemblance to some one or other, whom I can't quite place in my memory."

"The mother is supposed to be very good-looking." There was something in Mrs. Oswald's voice which made the quieter nun of the two glance up at her quickly and keenly.

"Oh!" The nun was frankly interested. "One of the visitors made me smile to-day; she thought Mary very like the Bishop in expression, and the shape of her face. . . . It is a very great honour," she added sedately, "to be told that. His Lordship has the face of a saint."

"A well-fed, shrewd saint," thought Mrs. Oswald, but she did not voice the thought.

They moved on to a corner of the garden near the gate, stopping a moment here and there to exchange greetings.

Very conspicuous among the gathering was His Lordship, the Bishop of Colbourne, gloriously arrayed in all his regalia for the occasion, and surrounded by several younger priests who trod the

earth of the episcopal circle as if it were a celestial carpet, of magic texture, that might transport them at any moment to the higher regions.

"Oh! he is going," breathed a group of the nuns unanimously, as the Bishop made his way in and out of the crowd, shaking hands here and there, while a motor came slowly up the drive.

"He is going very early," murmured sister Mary Clementa disappointedly; and she turned to a passing nun—"Why is it so, Sister Mary Agnes?"

"Some appointment that will not wait, Sister; with the architects for the convent laundry, I understand."

The crowd, a glowing, moving mass of colour; the gay grounds; the grey convent in the background, with its newly-added cloistered verandahs, all made a charming picture.

There was the ripple of laughter, the hum of voices everywhere, and now and again the strains of the local band, or the cheerful rag-time of a merry-go-round for the children.

St. Hubert was not there, as far as Mrs. Oswald could see, and over and over again in her heart she said fiercely—

"He is with her, perhaps. He is with her. Oh! if I were only sure!"

And her little teeth met together in furious jealousy.

"Why has she not come, I wonder?"

And then, just over the lawn near the gate, Mrs. Gray did come slowly and gracefully, simply yet exquisitely dressed in a white gown that made her seem even more youthful than she was. She wore a large white hat, trimmed simply with a wreath of large pink roses, and under it her deep coppery hair glinted with threads of gold as she walked in the sunlight.

The Honourable Mrs. Oswald was about to move forward, concealing all the bitter thoughts of her heart and the wild rush of jealousy under a conventional smile.

June Gray had turned and seen Mrs. Oswald, with two sombrely-garbed nuns beside her; and she smiled a welcome, pausing for a moment on her way to speak to the Reverend Mother.

It was then, when she had turned with the sunlight on her face and hair, that Sister Mary Clementa had given a great start.

"*Why,*" she said, in a strange, hushed voice, "*It is June!*"

Mrs. Oswald turned quickly, feeling the nun's agitated clutch on her silken sleeve, and catching the look in the nun's face.

"*June*," she said slowly. "Yes, that is her name, Sister. Do you know her, then?"

"Who—is 'it'?" asked the sister. She seemed to have difficulty in finding words; and her gaze had gone for a swift second towards that further gate out of which the Bishop's motor had just sped.

"It is Mrs. Gray, mother of Marigold Gray," answered Mrs. Oswald. She was now watching the nun's face with curious intentness. "Do you know her?"

But the nun did not seem to hear. She was staring with fascinated, half-frightened eyes at that slim, white-clad figure coming slowly and unconsciously across the lawn towards them.

June Gray had been smiling, and the smile still lingered on her face; while just behind her stood Marigold, laughing at something the Reverend Mother was saying to her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Gray?" said Mrs. Oswald, a trifle shrilly, holding out her small, daintily-gloved hand. "I believe that you will find here an old friend."

Before she could finish the sentence she saw a change come over June's face; saw it whiten swiftly; saw the bright colour recede, and then

come rushing back, flooding brow and throat with vivid crimson.

She had looked past Mrs. Oswald, past the little nun with her plump, frankly interested face, at that other nun standing up very still and straight, in her sombre robes, her face very white and cold and proud, and over it a strange bitterness.

"*Mary*," she had said, beseechingly it seemed.

She half put out her hand, but the nun made no movement.

"So you—are Mrs. Gray," she said quietly.

CHAPTER XVI

GERALD AND MARIGOLD

Into the shuttle of life has strayed
A golden thread from a world above,
A glimmer of gold amid the grey,
And we earth-folk call it Love.

DOWN by the old sea-wall of the churchyard, the daffodils had broken into bloom—a glory of tremulous gold crowning the long, slender, sheathed stems. Soon the old grey wall would be hidden in a blaze of gold, flaunting there in that sunlit corner, life and death together.

Late one Saturday afternoon Gerald and Marigold came there together, pausing on their way homewards, and counting the breaking buds.

“How swiftly time passes!” the girl said dreamily, smiling shyly up at the boy’s handsome face. “Another year gone since last the daffodils bloomed here! Yet it seems but the other day since you and I and Rosa were but little children, gathering flowers here.

"*You* were the child," corrected Gerald, and he teasingly pulled the long fair curl that drooped over her shoulder. "You will always be a child!"

She stamped her foot, half in fun, half petulantly. "You forget that I am quite grown up now," she asserted. "I am no longer a child."

"You have attained the most wonderful age of eighteen," he said quizzically.

"And you are but twenty-one. That is not very old."

"Isn't it? Jim, the groom, was married when he was twenty."

A little faint flush came into her soft cheek. He saw the little smile break around her lips.

"Do you remember," she said, leaning against the wall happily, and looking down at the budding daffodils, "do you remember, Gerald, how Rosa and you and I planned out the future? You wanted to marry me, but Rosa wanted you to have the daughter of a duchess. Do you remember how we played at an elopement, with Rosa taking the part of a furious mother?"

"I remember," he said, and he, too, was smiling, but with a deep and abiding tenderness.

He had taken her little hand, and was holding it in his, looking down at her with adoring eyes.

Frankly she looked back at him, smiling tremulously now, her sweet face flushed.

"And it is going to be as we planned?" he said. He drew her arm through his, and together they slowly threaded their way in and out of the fallen tombstones—"That is, minus the furious mother, Marigold."

They paused and looked back at the little church.

"Some day," he said musingly and happily; "some day you and I will come up that uneven pathway, Marigold, and we will go before the priest and give our vows to each other."

His voice took on a deeper, surer note.

"And you will say, 'I, Marigold, take thee, for better or for worse—for richer or for poorer . . . until death do us part.'"

She was trembling a little, and she hid her face against his arm.

"Do you think it is wrong to be so happy, dear?" she whispered. "The nuns say the only happiness is within the convent walls."

"It isn't true," he affirmed stoutly. "How can they know? Why, most of them are mere children when they enter; and the others have gone in mostly because of some disappointment, and because

a cloud hangs over their lives, they think it hangs heavily over all the world."

She looked at him wistfully.

"The Reverend Mother told me once that she thought I had a vocation. I was not to tell Dearest—mother—that, because she was not quite sure."

He laughed, pinching her soft cheek.

"You will tell the Reverend Mother from me," he said, with the egoism of youth, "that *I* will attend to the vocation; or rather, tell her that your vocation in life will be to look after *me*."

She laughed shyly, and was silent.

"Mother thinks I am such a child," she said after a pause, and then she sighed, looking at him with shadowed eyes. "I often wish I had not gone to the convent, Gerald."

"Why, little sweetheart?"

They were walking on again, and all about them the sunlit grasses whispered softly to the Dead beneath of Love and Life and Youth above.

"I hardly know," she confessed.

"Don't think about it then, dear."

They wandered slowly through the churchyard, coming out at last by that outer gate that faced towards the sea, and the great grey cliffs looking ever seaward.

By the gateway a climbing rose was slowly breaking into bloom, and one single rosebud, frail and exquisitely pink, nodded down to them.

"You are, as I am, in the bud," it seemed to say, nodding wisely on its slender stalk, scenting the air with faint perfume. "Spring and all its glories are unfolding before us; so, too, is the springtime of youth. Gather your roses while ye may. Spring passes all too swiftly."

"Roses for Love," cried Gerald gaily, and he bent forward, and snapped the slender stem, and gave into the little hands of his love the delicate, half-opened bud. She held it for a moment against her face, inhaling its fragrance, then touched it to her lips; and suddenly, all at once, the colour bloomed in her soft cheeks, and her eyes fell.

In that moment she realized that the old childish affection had gone, and that in its place, something that set her heart beating, and a new shyness in her eyes, was come swiftly.

"What is it, little sweetheart?" said Gerald, and looking down at her flushing face and her eyes dim with happy tears, he, too, understood.

They turned, and hand in hand, like children, went slowly out of the gateway.

The sun shone down on the old churchyard ; on the blue, lazy, rippling sea ; on the two young lovers caught in the first sweet ecstasy of love.

They went slowly up the pathway, where the white sea-shells were as a magic carpet to their feet, and Youth and Love went with them, whispering of the future and of undying happiness. Only in the old churchyard the grasses whispered to the Dead underneath.

" Youth cannot see, as we, into the To-morrow," whispered the grasses now. " Love will be like the rosebud plucked at the gateway. It will wither and die before it blooms fully and fragrantly. It is written that the rosebud shall not burst forth into the glory of the rose."

But neither the girl, nor the boy, treading the magic road of youth heard, or hearing would have understood ; for they went up the sea-shelled pathway with sunlight in their hearts.

At the gate of the Gray House they turned and looked back at the old churchyard in the shadow of the church.

" Next year, when the daffodils are all blowing," began Gerald, and he smiled down into her eyes.

He did not finish the phrase ; but there, in the

friendly shelter of the high sea-wall, he bent and kissed her very gently.

"Good-bye, little sweetheart," he said happily, and turned away. She stood for a long while at the gateway looking after him as he went quickly down the slope, young and strong, his shoulders thrown well back, his curly hair bared to the sunlight and the wind from the sea.

"When the daffodils bloom again," she repeated softly, and the happy tears gathered in her eyes, and fell on the little rosebud she held, the frail rosebud that had lifted its face to the dawn-glory, and that already, before sunset, was withering fast.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TWO ROADS

"Tis not the things that we see,
But those that we see not;
'Tis not that which is written,
But that which is not written."

"**I** MUST tell the Reverend Mother. I cannot keep anything back from her."

"I am not asking you to keep anything back, Mary."

June's lips curled bitterly.

"You seem to forget that the Reverend Mother is not dictator of *my* world. Whether she knows, or does not know, is of little or no interest to me."

But her hands clenched a little, and her eyes held fear that was not for herself.

They still sat in the bare sitting-room, where an hour ago they two had gone mechanically.

Sister Mary Clementa had said something, made some excuse, and in a curiously strangled voice had asked that "Mrs. Gray" might accompany her.

They had known each other, years ago, she had explained with stiff lips that did not seem to find speech an easy thing.

They faced each other in the bare sitting-room, Sister Mary Clementa, still very white and trembling, June Gray, pale but very still.

They were speaking instinctively in lowered voices, for the door of this public room led out on to the main corridor, its windows open to the verandah.

“ To think that we should meet again—like this ! ” the nun had said, and a quivering mist swept between her and that silent figure opposite, and memory carried her swiftly away to Balberry, that little country town in a southern state, where they two had spent the years of girlhood.

Children had they been together, girls together, kneeling before the same altar ; then she, Mary, had gone into the convent, and her friend June remained outside.

Only a few weeks ago had she asked the Bishop about June, for the Bishop had been once a priest in that very town. It was strange he had not told her that June, under the name of Gray, was living a few miles away in Gray Cliff.

She had told the Bishop of the rumours she had heard, and the Bishop had carelessly qualified them.

"I believe it's quite true." She could hear him speaking the words as plainly as if he were in this very room. "Oh, yes—she made a hash of her life."

"And—they never knew—who it was?"

The nun had turned her face away when she asked the question.

"No," His Lordship had answered, rather sharply, "they never knew."

And he had gone swiftly on to some other topic.

Sister Mary Clementa stared up at the Christ on the opposite wall, but she saw no longer the tortured Figure and bowed Head.

That wave of forbidden retrospection swept over her, again bringing her back to the old country town, to long past years in which June and she had been playmates—children—girls together—friends always—she and the pretty dark-eyed June, who had been the belle of the country town, June with the laughing eyes and mouth as red as the scarlet pomegranates in the presbytery gardens—June with the white soul, who had knelt in that little chapel, Sunday after Sunday, and every holy day, and in the soft, purple, windless evenings that come with the Australian summer.

She saw the little town of Balberry, wrapped in

mist, the land at dusk blurring into a sea of purple, and trod again roads that June and she had once trod. In those days it was June who first thought of going into the convent—they had both been Children of Mary then, and the younger members had been wont to look up to June as a saint. It was *she*, Mary, who had hesitated.

Afterwards, standing vaguely afraid on the threshold of Life, the passing flood of emotion—or is it emotionalism?—that ushers in Womanhood had swept her into the convent.

She thought of the saintly priest, now a Bishop, on whose example of holy life she had striven to build her life; and suddenly she shut her eyes as if she would see no more the pictures of the past.

The priest had prophesied such wonderful things for June in the future—in everybody's eyes nothing had been too good for June. . . . It had hurt Mary then vaguely . . . it hurt her now to remember.

She had gone into the convent first, believing that some day, in the round of her life, June and she would meet in the service of God.

She had left all news of the world behind her once she had passed into the cloister.

To meet June as a nun, or as a happy woman

surrounded by all that would naturally be hers, that had been her dream of their meeting, when she had taken the veil as Mary Clementa.

But, this !

Dear God ! *what* had happened instead ?

The words of the Bishop rang in her brain, pulsing through all the atrophied years, echoing in her ears, with overwhelming horror.

With a little choked gasp she put her hands to her throat. It was only a dream—some dreadful mistake.

Then June had come through the open doorway.

Sister Mary Clementa had pointed wordlessly to a chair, in her eyes pity struggling against abnormal abhorrence of sin, and the tragic austerity of spirit that the conventual life had fostered.

By the open window—through which one could catch a glimpse of the sea, a wondrous sea over which lay a golden, sunlit pathway—June sat, her clear profile outlined against the darker woodwork, her shadowy eyes of brown downcast, her coppery hair shining with all its old beauty, and with its escaping curls near the temple, as of old, and her form still graceful.

The world laughed on outside. The breeze brought a girl's happy, laughing voice, and the sound of children singing.

June turned her head resolutely from the window, with all expression gone from her face save a half-sullen sadness and weariness of life.

Sister Mary Clementa spoke unsteadily.

"June," she said, "will you tell me . . . about it . . . ?"

"There is nothing to tell."

There was a hard, warning note in her voice, and the Sister looked at her helplessly.

Her hand went out, inadequately, then dropped again.

For a moment there was silence; then it was the curious, metallic voice of the nun, no longer the voice of the woman, that sounded.

"June," it said, "I desire to help you as far as I can. I want to save you from this—from everything"—her glance had wavered uncertainly before the smouldering fire of those brown eyes—"for—for the sake of old days—in Balberry—for the sake of—the past."

"The past is past," answered June, "I have nothing to do with the past." Her voice was curiously quiet now, quiet and unemotional.

"But . . . the future. . . . ?"

"There is no future for such as I," bitterly. "What little there is to do, I can no doubt manage to do without the aid of the Church."

"June, June," she pleaded, "can no memory of the past help you with the future? You say there is no past, no future. . . . Only in the convent can we nuns say there is no past, and no earth-future. We *say* it, but sometimes . . ." Her voice trailed off weakly.

She stood face to face with the Immutable, that wrenched all else aside but the present moment.

"Do you not remember all the dreams we had in the little old wooden chapel, the little town where we were girls together? Do you remember what Life held for us . . . what ideals, and how high your thoughts were, when we talked of the future, June? It was you—*you* who thought of all things holy, you who placed God before all else! Do you remember how our holy priest often called you, teasingly, 'Saint Catherine'?"

Something rose to the sullen lips of the listener, and then by a mighty effort was strangled—something that may have been a sob—or a curse.

But she did not answer, only her eyes held a curious half-pitying light as she looked at Sister Mary Clementa. The nun went on with forbidden tears gathering in her eyes.

"Oh, June, you say there is no Future. "Can-not the memory of your mother . . . your father,

. . . the little children who loved you so dearly, move you, June ? ”

June did not speak. She turned her face aside, towards the square of paling window-light.

She sat, curiously still, with eyes now on the grey sea from which the gold had gone, and the grey light crept into the room and left its chill on the nun's heart.

Out over the curving sweep of the beaches, a little seaside city, an Australian Venice, sprang to life and light suddenly on the low slope beyond, pendent and glowing, between grey sky and grey sea, with its electric lights stretching in ropes of fire above the water's edge, and outlining the bridges over which hurried black dots of humanity.

Even the dingy wharves were transformed into beauty.

Illuminations blazed suddenly out, and the word “Paradise ” fluttered into light over some theatre and blinked mockingly over the waters.

The trams swept sinuously past, too far for sound of bell to reach ; but now and again the wind rose and brought haunting music that it seemed would hereafter echo in each mind till that mind was one with the dust of the earth.

The nun folded her hands and, turning her eyes

from the glowing pictures flung on the screen of Life, made one last appeal. There was something in her voice, inspired, divine, but through it ran a thread of pain.

“ Cannot the memory of him, that saintly priest, come back to you, June? Remember his belief in you—his fatherly affection for you. I remember ” —her voice dropped—“ a night when you were unhappy; you cried and I did not understand why; but I overheard you say to him, ‘ *Must I give up everything?* ’ I understood, of course, that you were choosing between the world and the cloister, that you were striving, as I strove, to follow his holy example. He set my feet in the holy road of renunciation that led to the convent, he . . . ”

Then June swung round with a face from which agony, desolation, hopelessness had blotted out all other expression.

“ *Do I remember? Oh, my God?* ”

She looked at the nun, crouching in her chair now, and watching her with fascinated eyes.

“ Do you think, Mary, the heart ever forgets? Do you think that a life like yours, or a life like mine, can shut out remembrance? You know now that all the laws of the world, all the rules of any Church, have no power over the mind.”

Into the nun's eyes crept fear.

" *You* went to the convent . . . I stayed behind. You never knew why—shall I tell you now ? "

She looked at the nun again, then away, but her eyes saw not the sea.

" Because Love had come to me in a guise of which I could not tell you, even *you*, who were my friend ever since we toddled hand in hand to mass, you who had known all my thoughts. But this one thing "—her voice broke—" I have always thanked God you never knew. . . . "

The nun drew a deep breath, her white hands clenching the gold crucifix at her breast.

" Love came to me, and with it sorrow . . . and shame." The girl's voice grew out of the brooding dusk, deep and passionate as the story flowed forth, tragic with the repression of years. " Down in this cruel city, deserted and at times penniless, I learned the bitter lesson that shrivelled all the faith that was once in my heart, that made me what I am, what I always now shall be, in spite of all the prayers that ever may be said on earth, or in heaven, for my soul. . . . "

Her voice broke, and Sister Mary Clementa sprang to her feet, steadying herself by one hand on the chair behind her.

Like some tall, avenging angel she stood in her black robes, the years of her nunhood forgotten.

"But the *man*, June? Who was the man . . .? He should not have gone free . . . he should not have gone free."

The golden crucifix clinked as she moved.

"*Who was the man?*"

June turned and looked with inscrutable eyes at her, at the gold cross, but no word passed her lips

"June, by all you hold, or once held, most sacred and holy, will you not believe there is mercy, hope and forgiveness?"

"Mercy," the girl laughed dully, "what mercy would *you* even shew me if you knew?"

"*If . . . I . . . knew.*"

"If you knew"—doggedly. "Listen; you have appealed to me, you were going to appeal now, by the memory of that priest who leaned over the altar rails of the little chapel in Balberry. You tell me it was he who directed your feet to the holy road of renunciation. Ah, Mary"—her voice broke—"there is another road of renunciation, but it does not lead to the convent.

"You ask me by his memory, *his* memory"—her voice rose passionate, bitter, but with a despairing sound in it sadder than all tears.

" *His* memory ! "

Her hands went groping out before her ; then she bent forward. " Mary, did you never *guess* who ruined my life ? "

Her eyes with their agony of suffering swept to the nun's face, that worn face stamped now with a great fear.

Then Sister Mary Clementa did a strange thing, she slipped coweringly into the chair, with great gasps that died into a moan.

Her hands went flutteringly to her throat as if choking.

" No, no . . . oh, *no*."

But she *knew*.

" Two roads," said June at the door. Her tragic eyes looked around the room, at the crucifix on the wall, the fount of holy water, at the nun, huddled in the chair with face hidden in her hands as if to shut out many things—many things.

" Two roads—*your* road to the convent . . . and *my* road—to Damnation. . . . Oh, my God—. . . ! "

She laughed horribly.

* * * * *

And at the door, as one stricken dumb, on the threshold, stood the Honourable Mrs. Oswald.

CHAPTER XVIII

" IT IS IMPOSSIBLE "

So these shattered fragments of painted clay
Were once a saint on a golden shrine ?
This broken glass, with its silver rim,
Was a chalice that once held Love's Holy Wine ?
Is all, then, earth that I deemed Divine ?

THE wind was driving the rain fiercely before it
in grey drifting sheets that blurred the cliffs
and laid low the flowers in the garden.

" The daffodils are dying," mourned Marigold,
peering out of the window, and looking over to the
corner by the sea-wall where the golden masses of
bloom were beaten to the earth.

Up in her room the mother lay with face turned
to the wall.

Marigold, who had come home from the convent
only an hour before, on this stormy day that fol-
lowed the garden party, had not known that all
night long her mother had lain thus, staring unsee-
ingly before her, her hands clenched.

"Only a pain at my heart," she had answered in a smothered voice, and then—"Don't worry, dear. I shall be all right, directly."

Down in the kitchen Hannah had volunteered the astonishing statement that her mistress had spoken of leaving Gray Cliff almost immediately.

"Leaving Gray Cliff, Hannah! Why, mother has never said a word about it to me." Marigold looked astonished and not a little resentful, tapping her foot impatiently on the red-bricked kitchen floor.

"She will probably tell you all about it, when her head is better," said Hannah; and the girl had restrained an impulse to run upstairs again and question her mother.

"But she will leave me at the convent until she returns?" The girl's voice was rather petulant.

"I think the mistress intends leaving Australia," said the old servant quietly; "so of course, my lamb, you would go also."

"It's not like mother not to mention such a thing to me." Marigold stood near the kitchen window, her smooth white brow creased into a sudden frown.

"Perhaps she was not certain until last night, dearie."

"Oh! it must have been a business letter, then."

The girl's brow cleared. " Hannah, the rain is lifting."

She sped into the hall and seized her mackintosh and rain-cap, waving her hand gaily to the old servant as she ran down the sea-shelled pathway to the gate, where at any moment now Gerald might appear.

As she reached it she saw Miss Primrose on the road below, driving the old horse and the rickety buggy, that were always brought into requisition when an urgent telegram had to be taken any distance.

Evidently this telegram was of immense importance in Miss Primrose's eyes, for she herself, instead of the post-boy, was driving, and was now, evidently returning.

She caught sight of the girl on the cliff-path above her, and stopped the horse abruptly.

" Did you hear the news ? " There was exultant excitement in her voice, and a touch of pride as if the matter were a personal one. " Did you hear the wonderful news ? "

" What is it, Miss Primrose ? " Marigold leaned over the cliff, laughing down, a picture of girlish health and beauty, her fair hair golden against the grey light.

"About Master Gerald—no, I should say, his *lordship* now."

"Oh! now, Miss Primrose, not really, *really* . . . after all these years?"

"Yes, after all these years," said the postmistress proudly. "Not but what he might have had to wait until the end of his life, in spite of all Mrs. Oswald's prayin'. But accidents will happen. 'Twas I who just took the cable up, telling all about it, and it's a proud woman, indeed, that Mrs. Oswald is this day."

"And—*Gerald*?"—breathlessly. Somehow the shadow of the grim cliffs seemed to hover suddenly over her, chill as if with some impending calamity.

She drew a long breath and looked around her; at the big, lonely house against the rocky cliffs—the grey, rain-blurred sea—the wet, puddled road below, where Miss. Primrose's pink blouse made a brilliant splash of colour.

Everything seemed the same, yet was everything not the same; the greyness of the day seemed to have swept over her spirit as well as over the world; yet, only yesterday in the convent gardens at Colbourne, the sun had been shining, the spirit of gaiety abroad, and Gerald, with the new shyness that characterized their meetings of late, had slipped

into her hand the rosebud, and into her cheeks had come a new, warm tinge that had matched the delicate petals.

With the rosebud in her hot little hand, she had felt as if she had stepped out of the road of childhood for ever, and caught the first glimpse of a wonderful future—had stepped almost unaware into the sunlit outer courts of love.

" His lordship took it ever so quietly," said Miss Primrose. "'Twas Mrs. Oswald that was excited, indeed. Well, I must be goin' : nearly mail-time."

She whipped up the horse and, with a word or two more, vanished down the winding road to Gray Cliff.

Marigold stood on the narrow cliff-path long after the old, paint-blistered buggy had gone from sight. Silently and thoughtfully she turned and went into the house, creeping on tip-toe up to her mother's room a moment afterwards.

Perhaps Mrs. Gray heard the sound of a footfall on the polished corridor, and the opening of the bedroom door ; but if she did she made no sign ; but lay there, staring tearlessly before her, striving to think what had best be done.

Marigold went noiselessly down again to Hannah in the kitchen.

"Tell mother, when she awakes, that I've gone over to the Manor, Hannah; and that I'll be back in an hour or two."

Then, excitedly, she told the old woman the news.

"I want to be the first to congratulate Gerald," she cried gleefully; "the first to curtsy to him and say, 'How do you do, your lordship?'"

She was a happy, laughing child again in that moment; and for ever afterwards old Hannah kept that memory of her, and of the moment later when, with the help of old Thomas's fumbling hands, Marigold had saddled one of the horses, and had ridden round to the wide, white, sea-shelled sweep before the house.

The day was still ominously grey, the swiftly-shifting clouds denoting more rain; but as the girl turned for a moment she was the spirit of youth and joy incarnate, setting the old woman's heart a-quiver with emotion.

"Shure, 'tis the mistress will be losing her soon," she said with a sigh to the old man, as they watched the girl speed out of sight, her golden hair tied loosely and streaming out behind her. "Eighteen is the year o' love, indeed."

"She's very young," said the old man thoughtfully.

" To the mistress she is still the little child of the days when we first came here."

" Child ! " repeated Hannah, wiping her eyes with the back of her wrinkled hand. " Why, Thomas, man, we had two childer when I was her age."

Along the road to the Manor, the little grey pony and its rider galloped merrily, the hoof-beats ringing musically on the rocky road that wound first by the sea, and then curved suddenly westward to the low, timbered hill, where, out of the trees, rose redly the tiled roof and chimneys of the Manor and its ostentatious twin-towers.

In the drawing-room, with its Dresden colourings of palest blue and gold, its gilt, satin-upholstered furniture, and delicate silk hangings, Mrs. Oswald was apparently struggling against a violent attack of hysterics.

Hugh St. Hubert, who from his leggings and riding-cap had obviously ridden over in response to a hurried message, was standing by the window, frowning and looking out at the wet garden, an incongruous figure in that frivolous, dainty room ; and over in a chair by the ornate fireplace sat Gerald, strangely quiet and grave-looking.

Not one of the occupants of the room heard the sound of hoofs upon the drive at the other side of

the house, or Marigold's whispered, laughing injunction to the servants as the groom led her pony away.

"In the drawing-room, Brown? Well, I want to surprise them. I'll go in through the folding doors at this end."

Here, in this house where she had long been a petted and welcome guest, Marigold knew every nook and corner. Rosa, it appeared, had ridden over to the convent an hour earlier, evidently to distribute the news proudly, so in the drawing-room would be only Gerald and his mother.

"Mr. St. Hubert is there also, Miss," the housemaid said respectfully.

"I'll burst suddenly in, then," said the girl to herself, and she laughed to the flushed reflection of her face in a passing mirror. "And I'll bend the knee in mock homage."

She had gone quietly up the thickly-carpeted stairs, and had entered the large sitting-room divided off from the drawing-room by thick *portière* curtains; when suddenly she heard Mrs. Oswald's voice, with a sharp, quite unusual, almost snarling note in it. Involuntarily the girl drew back, her hand on the curtain, hesitating lest she should be trespassing. And Mrs. Oswald's voice rose again.

"I tell you she's a bad woman, Hugh, a really bad woman. And for Gerald there, my own son, to dare speak so to the mother who bore him. . . ."

She broke into hysterical sobbing.

"Lucy," said St. Hubert sternly, "you must calm yourself. You must not say such things. How do you know they are true . . .?"

The woman interrupted him passionately.

"They *are* true, I tell you! Didn't I see her face? Didn't I hear what Sister Mary Clementa said to her?—even if the sister hadn't admitted it afterwards? She's a vile . . ."

"Good God, Lucy," said St. Hubert fiercely, "don't speak like that. You are *not* sure, I tell you. I would not believe it. How is this nun, shut away in a convent, to know everything?"

Unable to move, unknowing why, the girl in the outer room clung to the curtains, watching the face of Lucy Oswald with fascinated eyes.

"I know this, Hugh," Lucy Oswald was saying in cold, dogged tones, "that if Mrs. Gray was married, Marigold was born before that marriage. Where is her husband, then, if she possesses one? No one knows, no one ever heard of him. The child, Marigold, is only a——"

"Mother, mother," cried Gerald in horror,

"for God's sake, drop the subject, or think what you are saying. What has it to do with you, even—even if it be true?"

His voice drowned for the moment all other sound.

No one heard the faint click of the *portière* rings, the sound of a sudden gasp, the dull thud as some one fell heavily against the wall of the room beyond, groping for support, craving that she might not hear, yet hearing with piteous acuteness, finding no strength with which to drag herself away.

"It *does* concern me, it concerns the honour of this house," cried Mrs. Oswald fiercely. "Yes, Hugh, I *will* speak. You are blinded by your infatuation for the woman. Oh! I know all about it, how you were seen arm in arm after dusk strolling along the cliffs, talking for hours. . . ."

"Lucy," said St. Hubert, with dangerous quiet, "you will please not refer to Mrs. Gray in that manner, in my presence."

She broke down then, finding refuge in weak tears.

"Gerald even," she sobbed, "would put his mother last."

"You are my first thought, mother," Gerald answered. There was a strange note in his voice, that found an echo of suffering in the heart of the girl outside.

She heard him go over to his mother, speak to her soothingly, and knew instinctively that he had put his arm about her bowed figure.

Blindly the girl tried to straighten herself, to grope her way out of the room. Inch by inch, so slowly it seemed, she made her way to the door, her brain seemingly paralysed, incapable of thought.

Something had happened, she was not sure what, only that in some dim way she was concerned in it.

" Promise me," Mrs. Oswald was sobbing, " promise me, Gerald, that you will put the girl Marigold out of your thoughts, that you will never mention her name to me again."

The girl with closed eyes leaned heavily against the oaken lintel.

She heard Gerald's voice, broken with emotion.

" I cannot promise that, mother. You know that my dearest dream was to make her my wife. She is only a child, perhaps, but I would have waited. Now . . ." He seemed unable to say more.

" But, *now*," insisted his mother shrilly, "*now*. Gerald, remember who you are. Look at the future before you, the untarnished escutcheon, the proud name you are to bear. Would you?—you could not have this blot upon it, on your children. . . . It is impossible."

"Yes," said Gerald, after a pause, a long, long pause. "It is impossible."

A few moments later, when he had seated his mother in her chair, when she had grown calmer, he went from the room, thrusting roughly aside, as might one in pain, the azure velvet *portière* curtains, going to his own chamber and locking himself in, barring the door as if he would bar out thought also.

He did not know that the girl he loved crept down the stairs like a wounded thing, dumb, incapable of speech.

He heard only, as one in a dream, the beating hoofs on the gravel.

Like a wild thing, with the hounds of fear at its heels, the pony galloped on, the rain beating in the rider's face, stinging her white cheeks, tossing dankly her loosened hair.

"A bad woman . . . a bad woman." The inanimate things of nature seemed to cry aloud the words, the very hoof-beats to re-echo them.

She saw the mother who bore her only with the straight, terribly narrow vision of the nuns, with the same tragic austerity of spirit, more cruel by reason of its youth, that has little or no understanding.

With a brain whirling with black horror, she went on her way, while over the great cliffs and the shrouded sea the rain-wet winds beat down.

howling around the grim grey house, with weird cries, like so many devils.

Armoured in the unconscious cruelty of youth, with all swept aside, except the austere teaching of the nuns, the girl went on, herself only something almost inanimate, dumb with suffering.

In the drawing-room at the Manor, Lucy Oswald had broken out again into fierce recriminations, everything forgotten, even the fulfilment of the dream of power and place she had long played for, everything except the bitter, blinding jealousy that enwrapped her. This time he had refused to listen, and as he strode to the door she called him wildly.

" Hugh, Hugh, what do you intend to do ? "

He turned at the door, his face very hard, but with a light in his grey eyes she could not understand.

" I am going to her," he said doggedly. " What else do you think I would do ? "

" Then you do not believe . . . ? "

" I believe nothing unless I hear it from her own lips. Even then"—he squared his shoulders, and looked past her, and his voice softened—" even then," said honest Hugh St. Hubert, " the world is wide. If the woman I love has no legal right to the name she bears, she shall have mine."

He closed the door after him as one who enters not again.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BITTER SHAME

The road winds dark and lonely,
The eerie winds grow cold,
Whispering of our idols
Whose feet Love deemed were gold.

SHE had gone swiftly up the stairs, and flung open the door; and, at the sound, the woman on the bed had sat up suddenly, with a suppressed cry. White-faced, with dark rings around her eyes, blood on her lips where the teeth had bitten, she stared at her daughter as if fascinated, seeing her so erect, so scornful.

"What is it?" she whispered, "what is it?"

The fear that was in her eyes was in her voice, also.

She had fallen but a moment ago into an exhausted doze, where her thoughts drifted into a dull chaos of formless suffering. The horror of the long night was on her.

By the door stood her daughter, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, yet some one who in this hour she felt was a stranger.

"What is it?" she cried, crouching there, the horror of that half-dream still with her.

The sound of a girl's bitter, unhappy laugh answered her; and a strange voice, that it seemed the mother had never heard before, said wildly, and yet mechanically, with misery but half-understood—

"You are a bad woman," said the voice, "a bad woman."

"Marigold, Marigold!"

The mother roused herself, awake at last, struggling to her feet; but the girl went unheedingly on.

"That is what they are saying of you. A bad woman!"

She put up her little hands to her ears, as if to shut out the sound of a hundred jeering voices.

"They say I have no name; that the name Gray belongs neither to you nor to me. Tell me if it is a lie, or if it is true. Tell me," she demanded.

Her mother made no sound. Clinging to the bed she stared at this stranger, white-faced, hard of voice, who stood in the place of the little child she had so dearly loved.

"So you cannot answer," the voice went on

bitterly. "It is true, then, though he would not believe it."

"*He?*"

The white lips just framed the words, and her hands went to the slender chain of the miniature.

"Hugh would not believe it, nor Gerald." The young, bitter voice broke a little now. "But it is all true, all true. Then what am I? . . . what am I?"

Suddenly she broke into desperate sobbing, slipping to her knees, and clutching convulsively at the door. As it moved slowly to, she moved with it, sinking lower and lower until at last her head was almost level with the floor. Then she flung herself downwards, her face pressed against the pale violet carpet, her young body shaking with terrible dry sobs.

Her mother stood as if stricken to stone, listening to the sobbing, incoherent words. Once when she went swiftly forward, the girl screamed out convulsively—

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Don't come near me!"

The world went black for June Gray in that moment; the room reeled around her—only that golden head, bowed low on the floor in utter abasement and shame, was still.

The curls that she, the mother, had often wound

round her fingers were glimmering dully in the half-light.

There was only the sound of that terrible sobbing in the room. The whole world itself seemed to have paused.

Outside, the rain beat stormily down, spattering fiercely against the window, and the wind was howling like a thing distraught.

Neither heard it.

Slowly, it seemed to the mother, her heart was turning to stone.

Its dull aching was beginning to cease, her mind was growing more steady, her soul was drawing away from this arena of suffering.

As the minutes ticked slowly away, something in her that was living and capable of suffering seemed to shrivel slowly, to become dried powder, that would crumble at a touch.

She was as one now who stood far off, watching the woman who had been, a moment ago, her suffering self; watching, too, with curious intentness, but little understanding, that bowed, sobbing figure on the floor.

Dimly she knew that the woman who had been herself was saying that *this* was what, through all the long lone years, she had been dreading.

That woman was thinking too of a night when the fisher-folk were searching for a little child who had been lost, seeing again, and living over again, those long hours of suffering.

The little child had died then ; had never been found ; and this was all a dream, from which the woman would some day awake.

The girl on the floor was but a stranger, sobbing over something she, the watcher, could not understand.

She put her hand to her head, striving to remember. There came back a flash of thought, but the following pain drove it relentlessly before it, and the memory was gone again.

With her hand to her head again, she looked stupidly around the room, and noted mechanically that the Malmaison roses in the Sèvres bowl were withering, and that the violet cushions on the wide, pale divan had faded with the sun.

A dull sense of misery stalked behind her, and she was afraid to turn lest she should face it, and find some living horror she instinctively dreaded. The sobbing seemed to gain in power, to shake that frail girlish body terribly.

"Get up !" the woman found herself saying.
"Get up !"

She was holding weakly on to the silver rail of the bed, feeling weak and helpless, with an overwhelming desire to rest.

Rest !

Where had she heard the word before. Why did it haunt her so insistently ? Then she remembered.

It was graven in a stained, broken tombstone, half buried in the green grass of a churchyard.

The sobbing thrust the vision away.

"Get up, Marigold !" She heard the woman, that had been she, saying authoritatively, "Get up at once !"

The sobbing ceased and the girl stumbled to her feet in half-conscious obedience, leaning against the wall, her riding suit stained with mud and damp with rain.

She heard a voice speaking that was surely not her own.

It was speaking of days, far back in a little town called Balberry ; of happy days that had never a cloud ; of a proud father and prouder mother, and sisters and brothers. It spoke of a man's love, but never revealing the man's name or position ; of a girl's white dreams thrust roughly aside ; of a white soul dragged in the mire ; of love "that demanded silence."

It told, that strange, subdued voice, of days in a great unknown city ; of a girl-mother, with a baby at her breast, seeking work and shelter, left alone to starve, with weak, incapable hands shrinking from no rough task. Those soft hands had toiled in a kitchen even, that the wee baby might be fed.

Step by step, through the years, the story went on, slowly and mechanically as a woman walking in sleep. It was as if some one watched from afar off another suffer, and recounted the story, the years unfolding one by one, coming slowly out of the shadowy aisle of the past, like sheeted ghosts, bearing mute and unwilling testimony.

So the story came to the present ; with life that was to begin again, with hope that was to have resurrection, with love that would atone for the past and shut out the old world of sin and sorrow.

When she had finished, the stillness in the room grew, grew. . . .

"The shame . . . the terrible shame," the girl was moaning now, beating her breast, "the terrible shame !"

But she was thinking only of herself !

With fascinated eyes the watcher saw the girl stumble towards the door, and on the threshold pause, her face white as death, something so cruelly

familiar about it, that the woman moaned and hid her face.

With a gesture she tore the silver chain from her throat, and the miniature spun across the room, falling almost at the girl's feet.

The woman with her closed eyes, her head pressed against the rail, did not see the girl mechanically stoop and pick it up, and, as mechanically, fumble at its fastening, but her fingers were stiff and cold, or the catch resisted.

Wearily, her hands dropped to her side, clutching the miniature fast.

The girl at the door took a step forward, then paused, looking at the woman's bowed head, its coppery coils of hair catching all the remaining light in the room.

"Who was my father?" she asked suddenly, fiercely. "Who was my father?"

The woman never lifted her head, never moved.

"Who was my father?" cried the girl again.

This time there came an answer.

"I . . . have given a bond of silence. You . . . will never know."

With a hoarse cry the girl stumbled to the door; paused uncertainly on the threshold, looking back

for one instant on the room as one who says farewell ; then the door shut behind her.

There was the sound of hurried feet on the polished corridor, duller and swifter as they went down the wide staircase, and then suddenly sounded the loud bang of the hall-door.

The wind tore around the house, rattling at the windows, drowning all other sound save the thunderous boom of the sea.

In the violet room above the mother moved suddenly, like an automaton, and as if propelled, towards a locked cabinet at the corner, above which a curtained portrait hung high.

She did not draw the silken curtain aside, but finding the cabinet key, she inserted it in the lock. She groped vainly for a moment, then out of the cabinet she drew a revolver, while something that had lain beside it tumbled unheeded to the floor.

With steady eyes she looked down at the revolver, passing one hand over her brow with a mute, weary gesture. Only one word beat at her brain—

Rest ! Rest !

And always it brought a vision of a golden glow against a grey sea-wall, of a little chapel in the shelter of giant black pines leaning away from the sea, of

a stained, broken tablet jutting out of the quiet green earth.

Rest! Rest!

It seemed to her then that through all the years she had craved for this, and had always set her feet to the quiet ways of life; and, now, her pilgrimage was nearly at an end.

It was then that her eyes went to a little bundle that looked like fur, upon the floor.

She picked it up, and looked at it stupidly.

It was just a little brown Teddy Bear that a baby might play with, very battered, its legs hanging by a thread only, its head crushed out of shape, as if little teeth had first tried their strength upon it.

She tried to remember how it came to be there, and to whom it had belonged. A dim memory came for a space—a memory of a little fair-haired child, to whom the battered brown bear had been the dearest toy. The little hands had clung to it for many years, and had laid it away reverently when older years brought older toys.

The little child—where was the little child?

There came back to her the sound of stifled sobbing, of a girl's voice—

“The shame . . . the bitter shame!”

But that was surely the voice of a stranger, some one whom she had never known.

There came, too, for one vivid moment, the roar of a stormy sea breaking over a broken pier, of a little child out in the night, of lanterns gleaming, and of brown-faced fishermen searching among the rocks ; and then of home—in the warm sitting-room of the Gray House, and a little Teddy Bear, propped up on the window-sill, where the little child had left it.

With a moan the woman fell on her knees, clutching fast that inanimate, furry bundle ; the revolver fell from her unheeded, dropping in the shadow of the violet curtains.

It was thus, with her tears falling fast on the battered toy, that Hannah found her.

CHAPTER XX

TO THE CONVENT !

Now, were Sweet Violets all
To people a garden with, one might uproot
This wilderness, and plant Sweet Violets.

ST. HUBERT had been waiting an hour down in the drawing-room before she came.

To him it had seemed a year, almost, since he had sent Hannah up with his message that he must see Mrs. Gray.

He had asked for Marigold, and the old woman had shaken her head in silent mystery.

All she knew was that Miss Marigold had dashed out into the rain and storm, saddled her pony, and gone to the station.

She had told Old Thomas that she was going into the convent.

"Going *to* the convent ? " St. Hubert said quickly.

"*Into* the convent, she said, sir. I did not go up to the mistress, because I knew that all night she

had been troubled. I thought perhaps it was because Miss Marigold wanted to become a nun, and the mistress was against it."

She stopped, hesitatingly.

"Go on," he said curtly. "Whatever it is, Hannah, you and I must help your mistress through it. Tell me everything."

"Miss Marigold was so happy this morning, sir. She had just heard about Master Gerald coming into the title, and she had the pony saddled at once, and rushed off to the Manor. . . ."

"The Manor!" said St. Hubert quickly. "At what time did she go?"

When Hannah told him, he gave a great start, and his face grew very grave.

He had sent her upstairs at once.

"Tell Mrs.—tell your mistress that I *must* see her at once, Hannah. Tell her it is *most* important."

It was an hour before Hannah came down, and behind her, slowly following, the figure of her mistress.

Hannah had evidently, with unaccustomed hands, brushed her mistress's hair; and now it fell around the pale face loosely, in heavily waving coppery masses.

She came forward quite quietly, with apparently no curiosity at his coming, and she sank down

without a word into the comfortable chair he pushed forward for her.

She leaned back against the cushions, her face quite colourless, her eyes unusually large and brilliant, almost feverishly so.

She spoke unemotionally—

“How do you do, Hugh? You will stay to tea?”

Her manner puzzled him. It was so curiously quiet, yet with no hint of restraint; her hands lay in her lap, white and untrembling.

He found difficulty in speaking, and he rose restlessly and stood, his elbow on the mantel, his face turned to the leaping flame in the grate.

“I’ve had tea, thanks. What is—June, is there anything the matter, anything in which I can help you?”

She knitted her brows as if puzzled, staring now at the fire, its dancing blaze casting sudden, shadowy hollows in her face.

“No one can help me,” she said, in a low voice; and then again, “No one can help me.”

“Surely *I* can, June. There must be some way in which I can—for—for the sake of Marigold.”

She looked at him, and then back at the fire.

“Marigold is dead,” she said in a whisper; “she died that night, among the cruel rocks. The sea swept her out. . . .”

" June, what are you saying ? " he cried sharply, and now he went over to her, and caught her cold hands in his.

" That was not my child that went out of the house this afternoon," she said. " That was—some one—a stranger, whom I have never known."

He was shaking all over.

" June !—you don't mean that you turned her out, just because she said—something that may have hurt her—that you told her you would no longer own her as your daughter ? " He had heard of such things during his professional career, of sons and daughters turned from the home and the door shut for ever against them ; but in these cases there had been no loving parent like June, no mother who had sacrificed so much for her child as she. Then, as she kept silent : " You—sent her to the convent, then ? "

She did not seem to understand, only sighed as if he wearied her.

He let her hands go and walked back to the mantel, his head resting on his hand.

He did not understand that the poor brain of the woman was numbed, paralysed temporarily with the shock ; that she moved and spoke only as one in a dream, only dimly conscious of the purport of his words and of her own.

He only thought that hers was the quiet of a soul preparing for conflict, steeling itself against the barbs of scandal, against the bitter words that might fall even from his lips.

He went back to her then, putting his hand on her shoulder in affectionate comradeship.

"June," he said in a low, steady voice, "I am your friend, now and always, through good or evil report. Nothing any one may say or do will have any effect on that friendship, that unchangeable affection I bear you."

She did not stir.

"We all—make mistakes at one time or another. No matter what any one may say, I shall see only the brave fight you made alone."

He turned his face away then, looking over to the window, where the red geraniums flamed between the curtains like fire revealed.

"I say to you now, June, as I said years ago when I first found out how dearly I loved you, that I am at your command, in anything and in everything."

She was silent, her hands very still.

"Marigold has spoken to you, out of the suffering of her own young heart, and the unconscious egoism of youth; she has, perhaps, even constituted herself your judge." His voice was low and unsteady now.

" June, I understand that Sister Mary Clementa knew you in years gone by, that you and she were schoolgirls together. You know what she has asserted ? "

He paused questioningly, and as she did not answer, took her silence for consent.

" She seems to have, in place of the girlish affection that one time apparently existed between you, a strange bitterness of heart and mental attitude towards you. From the little I have heard, I have formed the impression that her feeling is tinged with jealousy. Did she know the man, June ? "

She was dimly following his words now, only sufficiently however to affirm or deny, and all the while pervaded with the colourless feeling that she was but a mechanical gramophonic voice repeating the words of another.

" Yes. " Her voice was toneless, but still sweet. " Mary knew the man. At least she does now. I believe . . . that . . . she always suspected. "

He was biting his lips, his eyes dark and shadowed.

" Do you know where he is, June ? "

She was as a child, answering questions.

" No . . . no. " Her voice relapsed again into its settled sadness, its note of apathetic indifference.

" He . . . went away . . . out of the country.

I think he came back." Her hand went to her forehead, as if brushing away the cobwebs of stupor.

"I wrote . . . but he never answered."

It was as if she had said: "It does not matter. Nothing really matters now." And it wrung his heart foolishly.

He bent over her, smoothing back the heavy loose hair from her forehead.

"And what are your plans for the future, June? You will not want to stay here, I know. . . . The world is wide, June. It has many nooks and corners where one can find peace and rest."

"Rest," she repeated strangely. "Yes, that is it—rest!"

For the first time he saw that hers was the apathy of a great shock.

He went down on his knees by her side then, taking her cold hands in his, to warm them between his own, his eyes misty.

"Dear," he said huskily, "try to rouse yourself. This is terrible . . . terrible."

He bowed his head for a moment on his hands with a wild prayer for strength and power to help.

"Dearest, forget anything Marigold has said. I have sent old Thomas to telephone to the convent, asking them to find some means of sending her back.

If they can't, I shall go for her. We'll both go, for *you* must not be left alone. . . . Dearest, dearest."

The word seemed to arouse her, to beat like a little child's insistent hand at her stupefied brain.

She took her hands from his, pushing back the heavy hair from her brow as if its weight oppressed her. Then she sat forward in a crouching attitude, her hands gripped convulsively together.

She began to speak very quietly.

"I suppose it was a very ordinary story," she said, and there was an echo of far-away anguish in her voice. "He said he loved me. . . . I was very young . . . and I believed in the Church . . . and the priests were as God. . . ."

He thought she was rambling, striving to frame her story into words, and as yet he saw no light.

"I promised . . . him . . . that I would keep silence . . . through all things, yes, that was it . . . through all things, whatever might come to pass . . . and I gave the promise . . . and I kept it."

He let her go on, feeling it was best—anything to break that dreadful, stunned apathy that clung to her.

"He . . . couldn't marry me." She paused, looking for a long moment into the fire, while he

stood back in the shadows, saying to himself in a dazed way—

“It was a married man, then. . . . It was a married man.”

She lifted her small hands and looked at them curiously, at their delicate transparency with the flickering firelight behind them, at the long, tapering, white fingers, on one of which glimmered that lying gold badge, on another a diamond ring, that glittered and flung out points of fire.

“I have done everything with those hands,” she said pitifully. “I have scrubbed and cleaned in a cottage kitchen for my bed and board; I have sewed far into the night, that my baby might be kept warm. . . . I . . . I didn’t care what I did . . . I, who had never known what it was to have a work-stain on them. They are white now, but I remember when they were rough and red, when they were blistered.”

The tears were running down her cheeks. She was crouching back in the chair in a childlike attitude (oddly familiar when one thought of Marigold), her face as wistful as that of a child, but curiously pinched-looking and withered.

“I worked where and how I could. Later, when I had pulled myself up a little . . . when more

money was needed . . . I taught painting . . . then, somehow, I drifted into a newspaper office . . . from the telephone room to a desk of my own . . . and. . . . But there was always something to pull me down. In this particular office there was a spirit of jealousy among the more petty-minded, you could not possibly understand. Just when everything seemed against me the tide of Fortune turned."

The rest she told him in stumbling, broken words. But when she came to the present, and to what she had endured during the previous night and to-day, some cord of her mind seemed to slacken or to snap, so that over her again poured the terrible dark cloud of forgetfulness, the sombre curtain of oblivion.

St. Hubert watched her for a moment in silence, noting her pitiful attempts to remember, and then laid a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Dearest," he said very lowly, "don't think about it! When Marigold comes . . ."

She looked up at him with perplexed, unhappy eyes.

"Marigold will never come back," she said in a hushed voice. "She has gone out into the storm . . . into the rain . . . by the broken pier."

He saw then that in some curious way the two memories—that night of fear in the long ago and this bitter day—were for her linked together indissolubly.

For a moment he neither spoke nor moved. Then, looking away that he might not see her eyes, he said huskily—

“ June, have you forgotten that night by the sea when I asked you if you would come to me, when I believed you free? . . . as you are.” His voice rose on the last note. “ Have you forgotten? ”

“ No,” she breathed, and closed her eyes for a moment.

“ Will you come away from Gray Cliff with me, then, June? To-morrow if you like?—whenever you wish? Let me offer you, as I offer Marigold, a home and ultimate happiness far away from here.”

“ Oh, no . . . no.” Something in his voice had brought her for a moment back to her old self, and the scarlet of anguish flamed into her cheeks, and suddenly she turned to him, throwing out her hands with a gesture of pain.

“ Hugh, I—don’t know. If—affection were only all—but it isn’t. It’s the future that frightens me. I—I’m afraid to think of to-morrow. It seems to me that my life will never—never come right now

—that I bring unhappiness only to every one around me.”

He drew her to him, feeling the clutching of her fingers on his like those of a frightened child, and he did not dare to meet the misery of her eyes.

“Little woman, I shall guard and shield you from all sorrow as far as I can, and as long as my life shall last.”

The tears welled up in her eyes.

“As far as you can ! . . . Oh ! Hugh, all the loving care in the world has no power to bar the door of another’s heart, and shut out the things that hurt, when they are already housed in the mind.”

“But you will not think of the past, *then*. It will all be as an ugly dream that is over—and forgotten.”

Resting against his strong arm, she closed her eyes, the tears gathering and dropping slowly from underneath their closed lids on to the warm hand that held hers.

She shook her head now and again, as if in answer to her own thoughts, and with his heart throbbing and a terrible anxiety consuming him, he watched her in silence.

There was the sound of the hall door opening, the

swift inrush of the stormy wind and rain, and old Thomas scraping his boots noisily on the girder at the door.

St. Hubert laid June gently back among the pillows, looking down on her still, wasted face for a moment, and went quietly from the room.

In the hall outside he raised his hand to Thomas in a gesture of silence, and followed the old servant into the kitchen.

"She won't come back, sir," he said in a hoarse voice, untying the dripping muffler from his throat. "'Twas the Reverend Mother who spoke to me, very sorrowful-like, on the 'phone. She said that they had tried to make Miss Marigold go back, but that she would not. She said it was best to wait for a few days. . . ."

"There is no question of waiting," St. Hubert said quickly, and he turned and looked at faithful Hannah. "The poor soul inside could not endure another night like last night. It would turn her brain."

A spasm of pain swept across his face as he thought of her, and of that death-like stupor that had laid its clutch on her.

"Take my mackintosh, Thomas, and go up to the Homestead. Tell Smith to put the horses in the

buggy at once. I shall drive myself, if he brings them around here."

He turned at the door, his eyes resting kindly on the old man.

"We will not forget you for this, Thomas."

She was lying back in the chair, just as he had left her, her eyes closed as if she slept, and on her lashes the tears scarcely dry. Only the trembling of her hands betokened that anguished thoughts raced through her brain.

He roused her gently.

"Come, June. I want you to go somewhere with me to-night . . . to the convent!"

A slow shudder ran through her. His hands held hers warmly, diffusing strength.

"It will be all right," he said slowly, insistently. "We are going for Marigold. If you ask her to come back she will come."

She rose obediently, but as one not understanding; but when he would have sent Hannah with her to her room, she made a weary motion of dissent, and paused a moment, as if to gather strength, before going slowly upstairs.

It was only when she re-entered that pretty violet room that a memory of Marigold's face came back to her; then the dull pain, and the weight on her

brain, that seemed always to accompany the thought, followed, leaving her mind almost vacant.

She caught up a long cloak, and mechanically searched for a hood, finding at last one fashioned like the quaint grey bonnet, with its long chiffon streamers, which she was used to wear when she first came to Gray Cliff.

Once or twice she paused, looking around the room as a stranger might, and then piteously pressed her hands to her head.

As she passed by the divan, her foot clinked against something ; and stooping, she picked up the revolver.

"It was silly of me to leave it about," she said stupidly. "It is loaded in two or three chambers. No burglars ever come here."

She had her hand to her forehead again, as if striving to think, the dull gleam of the barrel catching the light.

"Once . . . I would have shot him . . . if I had known where he was," she whispered. "He left me . . . and my little baby . . . alone in the world, friendless . . . starving."

For a moment a blaze leaped into her eyes.

"If I . . . were to meet him now," she whispered.

"Oh, God ! if I were to meet him now !

Oh God! let me come face to face with him!"

There was the sound of Hannah's footsteps in the corridor outside; and with a little weary sigh, June, half-unconsciously, dropped the revolver into the long pocket of her enveloping cloak.

"You will bring Miss Marigold back with you, dearie," said the old woman cheerfully; and June looked at her, and said pitifully—

"Yes, Hannah."

But to herself she said—

"They do not know that she is dead . . . that she is lying there on the rocks . . . washed up by the sea."

And so she went down to the room where Hugh waited, and without a word he took her arm.

"Thomas will come with me," he said in a low voice to Hannah. "It would be better for you to stay, to be here when they return. Hilda is coming in a few minutes to keep you company. Don't let her know anything beyond the fact that Miss Marigold is ill, and Mrs. Gray and I are bringing her home."

Even as he spoke, they heard the sound of Hilda's feet upon the gravel at the door, and she came in.

A few minutes later the buggy was whirling down the road, the horses speeding on their way furiously.

June sat between old Thomas and St. Hubert, and during all that long journey she never spoke a word. The rain was still pouring down, spattering heavily on the leather hood of the buggy, but the wind, blowing in from the sea, was dying down.

Once or twice St. Hubert asked if she were comfortable, if she were warm, and she answered in monosyllables only.

He did not know that while they sped on through the wet darkness, with the lamps of the buggy glowing yellowly, and the long rays lighting up the sodden road ahead, the woman was not thinking of the convent as was he ; she was thinking, in a curious, detached fashion, of the man whom she had not seen for years, thinking of him with a hovering premonition that somewhere, soon, he and she were destined to meet.

CHAPTER XXI

“ NO FUTURE SAVE IN THE CONVENT ”

“ . . . I am the priest. Ye see not me,
Nor my earth-weaknesses, but only God
In human guise. Dictator of your mind,
Centre of all your faith, am I, the priest.”

IN the little convent chapel the sisters were singing the *O Salutaris*, and Father Flarney, at the white flower-decked altar, was celebrating the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. As he opened the Tabernacle, and the faint drifting smoke of the incense curled mistily about him, blurring the altar and the tall brass crucifix, the blended voices of the Little Sisters arose, in the beautiful half chant, half song, with its mournful minor notes that stir long-forgotten chords in the heart :—

O Salutaris Hostia,
Quæ cœli pandis ostium,
Bella premunt hostilia ;
Da robur, fer auxilium.

The voices rose in a volume of mournful sound, echoing and re-echoing through the little stone building, with its shadowy arches, and above the sombrely-veiled heads—

Uni trinoque Domino,
Sit sempiterna gloria;
Qui vitam sine termino,
Nobis donet in patria. Amen.

Perhaps many a sweet voice faltered on those last words, far from the land that gave them birth, craving not in the heart perhaps for "endless length of days."

In this hour, with the mist of incense rising between them and the altar, perhaps there came also the mist of tears, memories of other days, of other ways, and the thoughts in their hearts crept into that minor chord that ran through the music—

Qui vitam sine termino,
Nobis donet in patria.

A little Irish nun always closed her eyes with a swift prayer in her heart when she came to those two last lines—

"O grant us endless length of days,
In our true native land with Thee."

They were reciting the Litany of the Blessed Virgin now, and the Invocation rose and fell in a half-monotonous chant as the glories of Mary fell from

their lips. At the first words, a girl, kneeling in the shadows by the altar, bent her head lower and her voice sobbingly followed :—

“ We fly to thy patronage, O Holy Mother of God ; Despise not our petitions in our necessities ; But deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and Blessed Virgin ! ”

Sancta Dei Genetrix ! The hands of the nuns were beating at their breasts, and the low, rumbling sound of the *Ora pro nobis* followed.

Sancta Dei Genetrix (Holy Mother of God) !

Ora pro nobis !

Mater purissima (Mother most pure) !

Ora pro nobis !

Mater intemerata (Mother undefiled) !

Ora pro nobis !

Down the long list of Church-conferred titles, the nuns chanted until they came at last to the prayer—

O Sancta Dei Genetrix, nostras deprecationes ne despicias in necessitatibus nostris.

(O Holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities !)

* * * *

The light of day was fading fast ; the rain was falling heavily ; in less than an hour would the

black darkness of a stormy night slip over the world. The long ride through the wind-torn day, with the rain falling like tears, had left Marigold absolutely worn out in mind and body, almost stupid with the weight of woe that pressed down on her young head.

Kneeling near the Reverend Mother in that little chapel, with the candlelight and the red glow of the sanctuary lamp mingling with the grey of departing day, and with the perfume of flowers stealing drowsily across her senses, it seemed to her as if she had drifted miraculously into a haven of peace.

She was praying now for herself, wildly, despairingly, thinking of a day when, beside the old seawall, where the daffodils bloomed in a blaze of fading gold, Gerald had given her the little rosebud, whose fragrance had penetrated into her very heart.

Now it was all over—all over ! A black cloud of sin and shame had blotted out the sunlit sky of her youth.

If Gerald had only come to her, and had said, as even now she despairingly hoped he would say :—

"Nothing will make any difference, sweetheart, nothing—*nothing* !"

She caught her breath and buried her face in her hands, her shoulders shaking convulsively, only

half-hearing the priest's voice at the altar, or the chant of the nuns in unison.

"Mother of Sorrows," she prayed, and now the little bell was tinkling, and the nuns beat their breasts, "Holy Mother of Sorrows, help me, help me!"

And the voice of the priest rose and fell:—

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:

Parce nobis, Domine.

The nuns answered, their hands at their breasts:—

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:

Miserere nobis.

Marigold was crushing her hands together, her face white as the embroidered communion cloth looped on the varnished altar-railing.

"O Mother of God," she cried, despairingly, "help me, help me!"

An hour afterwards, in the sitting-room of the Reverend Mother, the girl knelt again, crying out for peace and rest, for the power to forget.

Father Flarney's honest face looked distressed as he gazed from the girl to the Reverend Mother.

"To-morrow, 'twill be different," he said soothingly. "Shure, 'tis herself that is worn-out, poor child, an' needin' rest and quiet. An' a sleepin'-draught would be what Doctor Tom would be prescribin' for her."

"I'm sorry the Bishop is not home," remarked the Reverend Mother coldly. "Have you any idea when he may arrive, Father Flarney?"

"Shure, he'll be at the Palace at any hour now," he answered, and his eyes glanced again at the little kneeling, silent figure of the girl. "But 'tis himself will not be comin' out in a stormy night like this, Reverend Mother."

Then to the child gently:—

"Rest, ye, little one. 'Tis the morning that will bring the sunshine, and the clear power o' thinkin'. . . ."

A frown gathered quickly on the brow of the Reverend Mother, and darkened her eyes.

"I'll be looking after Mary," she said. "And I'll not be keepin' you, Father. 'Tis a wet night, and a wild night outdoors. If ye should be seeing the Bishop to-night there is a message ye might be takin'."

"And that, Reverend Mother?" Over his simple face had passed a shadow as if of pain.

The Mother Superior put her hand on the girl's bowed head, and over the shining curls she looked at Father Flarney coldly.

"Tell the Bishop that Mary will be remaining in the convent, and there'll be no more worry for her."

Father Flarney waited at the door, one of his hands clenching a little.

"She's got the vocation," said the Reverend Mother, and now she looked away from the priest's steady eyes. "She will remain in the convent."

At that moment a sharp sound suddenly broke the stillness, the loud jangling of the outer gate-bell and the deep notes of a man's voice.

"'Tis not the Bishop," said Father Flarney; and then in a lower voice, "'Twill be the mother, no doubt. Will ye be wanting me to stay?"

The Reverend Mother rose.

"No, Father Flarney," she said, and her lips closed tightly as he went slowly out of the room.

"A lot of use or help you'd be, the holy saints know!" she muttered.

As Father Flarney went slowly down the cloistered outer aisle, he sighed once or twice. That was all.

In the chill, austere sitting-room, St. Hubert and Marigold's mother waited a long hour before the rustling of robes announced the Mother Superior.

All this while June Gray sat in silence, as if that dull apathy of indifference had settled over her again.

She did not look up at the few pictures on the

wall : a representation of Christ on the Cross, blood flowing from his side ; a full-length painting of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in an impossible cloud effect, and surrounded by sturdy angels.

Over the mantelpiece was a portrait of the Pope, and in another corner a framed portrait of the Bishop of the diocese.

St. Hubert crossed over and looked at it thoughtfully, striving to remember why and how the face was so familiar.

Where had he seen that pictured face ?

In some magazine or Church paper, perhaps, but he was not sure, and the memory puzzled and eluded him.

"There is a portrait of the Bishop over here, June," he said, and she roused herself sufficiently to answer, "Yes," in a voice that was toneless and without any interest. And she never raised her eyes.

The Reverend Mother came noiselessly in, short and stout, her black robes and starched wimple giving her rather florid face an air of dignity.

She looked questioningly at St. Hubert.

"I have the honour to be a friend of—of Mrs. Gray, Reverend Mother." He had hesitated almost imperceptibly. "I have asked her to marry me, and—and when this trouble is over, I hope and

trust that she will do so. I will make a home for her and Marigold out of Australia. I am sure you, too, will agree that it would be a happy solution."

A curious flicker came into the eyes of the nun; her mouth, set in its prim lines, hardened a little.

Cuirassed in the austere conventual teaching, and nurtured in the virtuous belief that the way of the transgressor *should* be hard, she frowned at the thought that, out in the world, beyond the convent gates, sinners were not *only not* treated as they should be, but apparently given satin cushions to sit on.

Her face was very cold and virtuously hard.

" Might I ask Mrs.—er—Gray, why she has come to-night ? "

" She came," St. Hubert said steadily, " for Marigold."

" Yes, I came," repeated June Gray, " for Marigold."

She was now facing the Reverend Mother, and holding with one hand to the chair for support. With the other hand, she smoothed wearily back the hair from her brow.

In the small enveloping hood and dark cloak her face looked pinched and small but still beautiful, while her eyes, very dark and restless, scrutinized the Reverend Mother's face.

"I must see my daughter — to-night," she added.

There was something compelling in her voice as if she threw from her, if only temporarily, the cloud of weariness that had settled over her brain.

The nun recognized in this woman a dignity and breeding before which something in her became, for the moment, servile and obedient.

She pressed the bell at her side.

"You shall see Mary," she said. "But I must warn you that she has irrevocably made up her mind to stay in the convent."

"But that would be impossible," cried St. Hubert, sharply.

"Not when Mary has the vocation, Mr. St. Hubert."

A telephone bell somewhere in the hall near by tinkled, and they heard the rustling of robes as a nun went to answer it.

Then her voice was heard :

"Yes, your Lordship. Yes. . . . I will tell the Reverend Mother. . . . To-morrow, then."

There was a click as the receiver was hung up ; a soft knock at the door ; the obeisance of a timid nun.

"His Lordship the Bishop will be here early in

the morning, Reverend Mother. He says the night is very wild and stormy, and the road impassable for the motor."

As she went out she stared curiously at the figures of the man and woman, and noticed that the woman's skirt was splashed with mud, and wet with rain, assurance of a long journey.

The dark, restless eyes of the woman, turning on her for a moment, haunted the little nun.

Superstitiously, she crossed herself as she went down the corridor.

A moment later, between two nuns, Marigold came into the room.

After the first fleeting second she did not look at her mother or St. Hubert, only stood in her black convent serge, a little in front of her bodyguard of nuns.

In their sombre garb, with eyes downcast, lips pressed primly together, the Sisters stood, their arms folded, convent-wise, in their capacious sleeves, rosary and crucifix suspended from the cord at the waist.

Like gloomy statues, and as dumb and apparently as unhearing, they stood.

St. Hubert expected, as had, perhaps, also, the Reverend Mother, that there would be a scene, that

June would rush hysterically forward and beseech her child to return.

But nothing happened.

Once only did the mother look at the girl, with her hair drawn primly back and tied stiffly, her face white and expressionless.

The Reverend Mother broke the painful silence.

"Mary has come to the convent for shelter and to find peace of heart. She desires to seek the one true refuge from the world." Her voice was monotonous but firm. "To her the world is an evil place. It holds nothing for her."

No one moved.

With her hands clasped as if in prayer, Marigold stood, her eyes on the white *papier-mâché* figure of the Christ, nailed to the black cross on the wall.

She was remembering, as she had been told by the nuns to remember, how cruelly Christ had died to atone for the sins of the world. He had given His life in expiation. She, too, was called upon, the Reverend Mother had insisted, to make a sacrifice for a sinner.

In the little chapel upstairs, where they had taken her but a few moments before her entry into this chill sitting-room, she had been instructed in the way of an obedient daughter of the Church.

"The world is but a day," one of the nuns had said, "a dark, stormy day. The convent is the only refuge, built in the shadow of the Rock of Ages, the Church. There is no rest or peace outside its gates."

The low, mechanical voice of the nun ceased at the summons of the little tinkling bell in the public sitting-room.

"She has no desire to go back to that world which for her only holds unhappy memories," said the Reverend Mother. "His Lordship the Bishop has said"—she made a stern, telling pause—"His Lordship the Bishop has said that, considering the circumstances, it is best for her, and for all concerned, to listen to the voice of Faith that bids her come into the Fold."

From a long way off the voice of June Gray came.

"Marigold," it whispered, "is this your desire? Tell me."

"Tell your—mother," commanded the Reverend Mother in a low, insistent voice.

Step by step, as if propelled by some unseen force, the girl came forward, and paused in front of her mother, but her eyes were not on that tragic, watching face, but on the tortured figure of the Christ on the Cross.

Her lips moved once or twice vainly.

"Tell your mother," said the Reverend Mother smoothly, "tell your mother of your decision."

Slowly the girl spoke, her voice sounding strangely loud in the room.

"I have got the vocation," she said. "I desire to stay here in this convent, and eventually become a nun. I have no other desire than this."

She stepped back again, still looking at the black cross on the wall.

"That is your desire, Marigold?" asked St. Hubert, sharply. "Think—think."

"Mr. St. Hubert!" reproved the Reverend Mother. "This is a matter between Mary and her mother—rather, between Mary and her God."

But he did not heed.

"Marigold! . . . Your mother will go away from here, and life will begin again, all the old sorrow passed away, no regrets . . ."

Her lips moved. He did not know that the child—nay, woman—was hearing again a voice of yesterday, repeating again words uttered in a scene alien to this, in a dainty blue-and-gold drawing-room.

"*It is impossible,*" the voice had said; "*yes, it is impossible.*"

The Reverend Mother turned and looked at Marigold.

The girl spoke then.

"I am happy," her far-away voice said. "The things of the world no longer exist for me. I desire no future save in the convent, among the good sisters."

Her voice was now the soft, droning voice of a child repeating its catechism; no one spoke, or moved, while it filled the room; and the silence that followed was long and pregnant with meaning.

June Gray turned and looked at her daughter, seeing her as it were for the first time in a new life, seeing the world perhaps as seemingly the nuns saw it.

"Do you think you will be happy, Marigold?" Her voice had a strange gentleness that brought a mist to St. Hubert's eyes.

"I am . . . very happy."

The girl's voice was but a whisper.

She did not look at her mother, only with anguished eyes at the cross. "I am . . . very happy."

"So, *then*, am I," said the mother. And she turned and walked to the door.



She closed her eyes while the nun led the girl from the room, Marigold slowly following, with no backward look.

The Reverend Mother stood uncertainly for a moment. Then St. Hubert rose and gave his arm for support to the still waiting figure at the door.

As they were passing silently out, just where the portrait of the Bishop smiled down at them, the woman turned and looked up as if impelled.

She gave a great start, a great quivering start, shrinking back against St. Hubert's arm.

"Who—is this?" She turned swiftly on the Reverend Mother, a light flaming in her eyes, her hands trembling violently.

"That is the portrait," said the Reverend Mother suavely, "of his Lordship, the Bishop of Colbourne," and paused, struck by something in the woman's white face.

Slowly she lifted her hands, that lying badge, her wedding ring, glimmering dully in the feeble light. Her lips moved, but no words came. And as slowly, her hands dropped to her sides, where she fumbled vainly in the pocket of her gown.

Then she laughed; looked back at the Reverend Mother and laughed, a strange, cracked peal of laughter that rose, and fell suddenly, and broke on

a queer sobbing sound ; echoing and re-echoing in that big empty room like the horrible merriment of a maniac.

" For God's sake, June," St. Hubert whispered. His shielding arm went out as she swayed, one hand going to her throat as if fumbling for the chain she always wore.

It was only then that he saw the miniature was gone. . . .

She passed out of the room with no word of farewell to the Reverend Mother, who stood watching her with fascinated, half-frightened eyes.

Outside the gate June clung to him piteously.

" Hugh . . . Hugh. I can hear my baby crying, . . . my tiny, tiny baby. . . ."

There was only the sound of the wind, of the dull, heavy fall of the rain.

" No, no, there is nothing," he said soothingly. " June, come home—and rest."

" *Rest !* " She looked at him strangely, and then half-spoke, half-whispered : " Hugh, I must see—the Bishop to-night. I must see him."

" Do you think it will do any good ? Leave it until the morning, June. She will surely come back."

" She will never come back," she said in a curious voice. " She—is very like her father, Hugh ! "

He did not understand.

"Go home to-night and rest, June. I will see the Bishop, if it will bring you peace of mind for to-night."

"I—will rest—afterwards," she said with dry lips. And then: "Hugh, I must see him—the Bishop, to-night—before I sleep."

"Poor soul!" he said to himself. "Little comfort will the Bishop give her—but—if it only means peace of mind for one night for her. . . ."

He broke off sighing, and silently tucked the rugs about her.

"Drive to the Bishop's Palace, Thomas," he said in a low voice.

* * * * *

Long after the outer door had closed behind them, the Reverend Mother stood listening to their retreating footsteps on the wet gravel, to the dull clang of the outer gate behind them, to the sound of wheels on the wet road speeding into the distance. With one hand on her heart, she stared up with curious intentness at the suave, smiling face of the Bishop of Colbourne.

Hurriedly she left the room a moment afterwards, her slippered feet making no sound on the linoleumed

corridor, and straight upstairs she went, pausing at last at the door of a nun's room (that to the outer world is known as a cell). She looked down with dark inscrutable eyes at Sister Mary Clementa lying on her narrow bed, the clothes flung from her as if with feverishness.

"Are you better, Sister Mary Clementa?"

"Yes, Reverend Mother." The nun made a weak effort to rise.

"Then, you are well enough to answer any questions I may put to you?"

"Yes, Reverend Mother." Fear trailed its length through the obedience of the nun's voice.

"Do you know who was the father of Mary—the child known as Marigold Gray?"

A few days ago the nun had answered the same question with averted eyes and "*No, Reverend Mother,*" in a low voice.

She was silent now.

"Sister Mary Clementa, is your illness the illness of remorse? of one who has, in telling a lie to the Superior of the convent, told a lie to the Blessed Mother herself?"

The voice was very stern.

The nun, dragging herself to her knees, sobbed in abasement at the feet of that older nun, moaning

and crying, incoherently, words of remorse, and pleas for forgiveness.

"I . . . do not know. I . . . do not know. There were rumours . . . hushed up." She broke off, babbling, and only one word did she say, over and over.

"This *miniature*," said the Reverend Mother—she drew it slowly out of the deep pocket of her black gown, and looked down at its flat silver case glimmering dully in the light—"This miniature the child Mary brought to-day. . . . It was something her mother always wore, she said; and finding it on the floor with its broken chain, she had unconsciously picked it up. What do you think is in it, Sister Mary Clementa?"

"Mary told me . . . once, when I asked something about her father . . . before I knew that June—before I knew who her mother was . . . that her mother always wore the portrait of her father. She said that she had not seen it opened for years, so long that she had no memory."

The Reverend Mother still stared down at it, staring at it with the fascinated, half-frightened look with which she had followed the woman downstairs.

Her hands shook violently as she tried to open it,

and her fumbling fingers touched somehow the hidden spring.

With a sharp click the miniature-case flew open, and Sister Mary Clementa hid her face suddenly in her hands and began to pray, hoarsely, incoherently.

"O my God," said the Reverend Mother suddenly, "O my God!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE END

. . . We find in hearts' blood, written red,
All that we deemed long cold and dead.

THE lights of the Palace were glimmering brightly among the tall trees ; the glowing bulb of an electric light blazed above the arched doorway.

To the left ran a long wing, apart and yet connected with the main building, where the Jesuit Fathers found temporary habitation, until the means came to build a stately dwelling-place of their own ; while far out, on the fringe of Colbourne, on the very outskirts of a new suburb, Father Flarney had been sent, simple, kindly pioneer who unconsciously blazed the tracks and made progress so possible and swift.

In a spacious chamber, and in a deep comfortable chair, the Bishop sat alone by the fire. On a tray beside him stood a whisky decanter and some glasses.

As he rubbed his hands and smiled, he thought of the progress made, mentally running down a list of the wealthy Protestants of the district whose donations had been a material factor towards the building of the new convent laundry already in process of erection.

"We'll have a big monastery begun, too, before the year is out," he said, and rubbed his hands again.

The bell rang suddenly, but he did not heed it, for young priests were available for any sick calls, night or day, unless in most exceptional circumstances.

His thoughts drowsed dreamily on, lulled pleasantly by the warm fire and the costly comfort of the room.

The waiting-room downstairs was decidedly less ornate, and decidedly more suggestive of the poverty and the humility which priests are supposed to take for comrades. It was a work of art, that lower room, calculated to impress the most casual observer with one more instance of the renunciation of comforts by the priesthood.

There was a low knock at the door, and the voice of a housemaid :—

"Mrs. Gray to see Your Lordship."

"Mrs. Gray?" His glance went to the clock,

and noted that the hands pointed the half-hour after nine. "It is very late—but—I will see her. Where is she, Bridget?"

"In the lower sitting-room, Your Lordship."

"Ah!" He thought a moment, glancing longingly at the fire with a thought of the chill, if impressive, room downstairs. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

The Mistress of Gray House would not be in a mood to notice any room, no doubt; and he remembered what an air of luxurious simplicity had pervaded the Gray House on the occasions he had called there.

"I'll manage her," he said to himself with curling lip. And then aloud, "You will show Mrs. Gray up here, Bridget."

With care he wheeled the liquor-table out of sight into a shadowy recess, and stood in front of the fire, his back to the mantel, in what one of the local reporters had described as "a characteristic and dignified attitude."

The Bishop shrugged his shoulders a little impatiently. Women were all the same, he said to himself—tears and reproaches, and then silence.

Ah, yes! He could depend on managing this case, he repeated. Under the—er—special cir-

cumstances, Mrs. Gray would come to the ultimate conclusion that silence was the only thing. Under the circumstances, she would also, with careful manipulation, no doubt, come to another conclusion, and that was that a substantial dowry, with the novitiate of her daughter, would do much to wipe away the sin. . . .

So little Mary was a love-child, he had said to himself once or twice that evening, with a sense of impatient pity, for he had been strangely drawn to the girl. She reminded him—in some vague way—of something best forgotten, something that *was* forgotten.

He had done his duty to the Church—the one, True Church—and therefore to his God.

The episode was long over, buried with the years, June probably married long ago, the child dead ; or a foundling.

He stirred uneasily.

He had not done wrong from the point of view of the Church. The Archbishop had said that the State provided plenty of Homes of Refuge for the erring, and Foundling Hospitals for the children—and she would forget, as he would forget.

Sometimes he was not sure that he had quite forgotten ; and again he stirred uneasily. But he

shook himself and tried to concentrate his thoughts on the present.

He could picture the woman downstairs quite plainly, probably wearing widow's weeds; grey-haired, of course; either very tall and thin, or very short and stout; and, no doubt, her eyes would be unpleasantly red with weeping. He hated "sniffing" women.

Anyhow, the interview would soon be over.

He yawned and glanced at the clock again.

Downstairs, in the room below, with its cheap, worn, second-hand horse-hair chairs, and the high, bare, white walls with their many representations of saints treading the world's thorny path of renunciation, June sat, a strange eagerness on her face.

St. Hubert had come in with her, waiting uneasily, he knew not why.

At the housemaid's message, June Gray turned, her face alight, all eagerness, its weariness swept magically from it.

"Poor soul! She thinks," he said with a sinking heart, "that the Bishop will help her. If she were a *poor* woman, perhaps . . ."

She turned to him, looking at him for a long moment, the little hood back from her face, her coppery hair in little damp curls about her ears.

The face was extraordinarily young and girlish-looking.

And her eyes were old, old with suffering, yet alight.

She held out her hands to him tremulously.

"Wait outside in the buggy, Hugh," she said. Now she was trembling. her eyes misty with unshed tears. "God bless you, Hugh, dear, for all your kindness."

She went slowly out of the room, pausing for a moment and looking back at him ; and so he always remembered her.

He went outside, where in the darkness at the gate old Thomas drowsily waited.

Overhead the sky was clearing slowly, and here and there through the ragged curtains of cloud the stars peered wanly. By morning the storm would have passed.

"And, please God, the storm in her life, too," he said.

That odd look in her face haunted him ; the nervous fumbling of her hands, and the light in her eyes, for one breathless moment had made him fear that her brain was turning.

Then he thought of her pausing at the door, her sweet, trembling smile, her last words of affection,

and Thought swept him impetuously into a happy future, a future in which he saw himself guarding and shielding her from all care and sorrow.

He looked up at the sky, breaking far over the sea into a sudden clearness, the broom of the wind sweeping all cloud-wrack before it, and over the rim of the sea grew a band of silver, slowly widening, as a late moon crept slowly upwards.

His mind went back to the scene at the convent, to Marigold moving, answering, like a mechanical toy.

"Poor child!" he said. "Poor child! for her, too, there will yet be happiness."

And so he drifted dreamily on to the moment when June, pausing by the door, had looked up at the Bishop's portrait; and then, suddenly, memory tore the veil aside, and led him back through the years to a curtained picture in the tower-studio of that lonely house by the cliffs. And he knew—in that terrible, lightning-swift moment of realization, he knew the meaning of words that had seemed incoherent, he understood the bitterness of Sister Mary Clementa.

"No, no," he cried aloud, and his voice woke old Thomas from his wearied doze. "No, no."

But the arrow of knowledge had pierced his soul;

he saw now the child Marigold's face; saw also that of the Bishop; the same chin, the same swiftly fleeting expression . . . !

The Bishop straightened himself as he heard the rustling of a woman's silk-lined skirts in the corridor, and looked down at the floor as if in calm, dignified contemplation, as Bridget announced, "Mrs. Gray, Your Lordship."

The door opened and the woman came in, pausing on the threshold.

He waited an instant, expecting her to rush forward, to precipitate herself hysterically, albeit reverently, at his feet.

The silence grew, with something vaguely menacing in it.

He looked sharply up.

And June came slowly towards him.

He stared at her wordlessly, suppressing a sharp cry, looking past her for a moment as if she might be in truth a ghost, all his superstitious Irish blood surging through his veins.

"June . . ." he said in a whisper. "June !"

She laughed, a strange bitter laugh that chilled the blood at his heart.

"So after all these years we meet," she said, "we meet, you and I. Fate plays strange tricks. . . ."

She was like and yet unlike the girl he had known. The subdued light that fell on her face left it young, girlish, touched with the evanescent beauty he had known.

It was as if she had stepped out of the grave of the years, in a resurrection of joyous life. Strangely enough, the thought brought with it the odour of dead leaves, of damp earth-mould, of rotting cerements.

He did not like the sound of her laughter. Yes, it was her laughter that had altered.

"We meet again," she said, "you and I . . . and Marigold . . . your child, over in the convent."

"Marigold!" he cried. "Little Mary."

"Little Mary!" she said. . . . "Listen, don't you hear her crying? . . . a wee baby whimpering in her cradle, crying, crying, hungry and cold? . . . and a big boat putting out to sea, and a band playing, and life and laughter about you?"

"My God!" . . . he said, stupidly. "My God!"

She was fumbling now in her pocket, seeking something.

What had she there?

Some proof of what was past? . . . some proof that might blast his future?

With a snarling sound he sprang forward, sending fear to her face.

She stumbled a little, and then her right hand flashed swiftly out, and the light overhead glimmered dull on something she held.

There was the sharp crack of a shot that shattered the silence of the Palace with swift and terrible meaning ; and then the sound of a heavy fall.

The woman looked down vacantly at that which lay on the floor, and at her right hand in which the revolver trailed loosely.

Suddenly she began to laugh—hideous, soul-tearing laughter.

That was the only sound they all heard as they rushed upstairs, the sound of horrible, maniacal laughter ; and then Bridget's shrill scream of horror.

"It is the end—of everything," June repeated childishly.

She looked up at the Christ on the Cross, and then down at what lay on the floor.

The second shot came just as St. Hubert and the priests reached the door of the Bishop's room.

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